OLD!

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CLASSIC GAMES

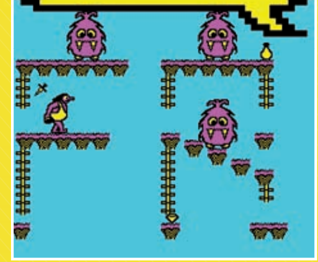
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THE MAKING OF… FRAK!

THE PLATFORMING CAVEMAN WHO SET THE BBC ON FIRE



THE COMPLETE HISTORY OF SUPER MARIOKART

WHY THE HIT RACING FRANCHISE REMAINS AHEAD OF THE PACK



SYSTEM SHOCK 2

THE FPS THAT CHANGED PC GAMING FOREVER

RETROINSPECTION

MSX

AN IN-DEPTH LOOK AT THE QUIRKY JAPANESE HYBRID

R-TYPE

BEHIND THE SCENES OF THE MOST ICONIC HORIZONTAL SHOOT-'EM-UP OF ALL TIME

IN THIS ISSUE OF RETRO GAMER

ECCO THE DOLPHIN THE TALE OF A 2D DOLPHIN WHO BRAVED THE DREAMCAST'S 3D WATERS

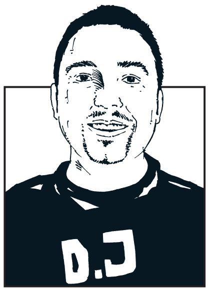
ROBOTRON THE HIT BLASTER THAT'S STILL INFLUENCING NEW SHOOTERS

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THE RETROBATES FAVOURITE MARIO KART CHARACTER



DARRAN JONES
Toad's voice simply became far too annoying in the later games so I'll go for Bowser. He took an age to master on the SNES, but there's nothing more rewarding than using his huge bulk to force your way to first place.
Expertise: Hiding new Blu-ray releases from the missus
Currently playing:
Dead Space
Favourite game of all time:
Robotron: 2084



ASHLEY DAY
I tend to go with the smaller characters as they feel a bit faster and can weave in and out quite easily. Out of all of the little ones I'd probably go for Toad because he has a funny hat.
Expertise: The games of Team 17, MSX, Sega's *Shining Force* series
Currently playing:
Castlevania III: Dracula's Curse
Favourite game of all time:
Shining Force III



STUART HUNT
It's a tough one, but as my school reports described me as an 'averagely average' student, I'll say Mario, the all rounder. I can relate to his evenness.
Expertise:
Games with flying bits in them
Currently playing:
Mirror's Edge
Favourite game of all time:
Mirror's Edge



CRAIG GRANNELL
For some reason, I always end up playing as Yoshi, despite his whoops of glee being more irritating than every winner of *The X Factor* simultaneously singing karaoke in your house.
Expertise:
Games you don't need 37 fingers to control
Currently playing:
Dropship on iPhone
Favourite game of all time:
H.E.R.O.

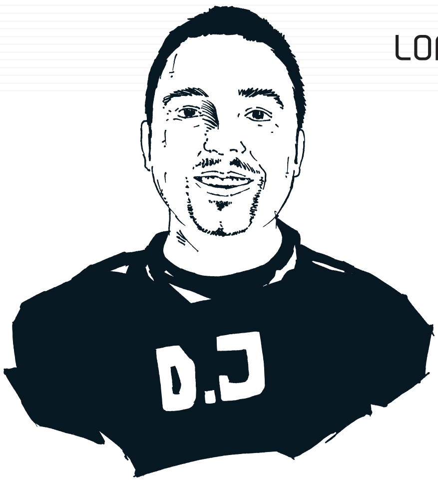


PAUL DRURY
Donkey Kong. Seeing the big ape squeezed into a kart, hunched over a miniature steering wheel, seemed to say it was okay for grown men to still be playing the games we did as kids. Validation.
Expertise: Getting old programmers to confess their drug habits
Currently playing:
LocoRoco 2
Favourite game of all time:
Sheep In Space



DAVID CROOKES
Yoshi. And I thought it was really cool when a track in *Mario Kart Double Dash* resembled this top dinosaur when viewed from above. Tribute indeed.
Expertise: All things Amstrad CPC, *Dizzy*, Atari Lynx and PlayStation
Currently playing:
Fallout 3
Favourite game of all time:
Broken Sword

LOADING...



Read any gaming magazine nowadays and you'll see nines and even tens thrown about with gay abandonment. It seems that not a month goes by when a game isn't proclaiming itself to be the best of its kind and it's starting to get a little tiring. Yes, *Halo 3* is a great multiplayer experience, and yes, *Dead Space* is one of the most refreshing takes on the survival horror genre that I've played in a long time, but will I still be playing them in 20 years? Probably not.

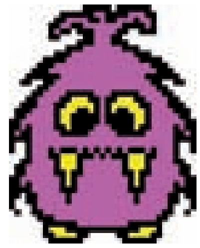
The continual advancement of 3D gaming is the main culprit for this, with games now appearing to age incredibly fast. 2D sprites, on the other hand, are timeless and look as fresh and exciting as the day you first saw them. I love the latest graphic-loaded adventure or first-person shooter as much as the next man, but I can still be stopped dead by the sheer exquisite beauty of a 2D *Sonic* or *Miner Willy*. Take this month's cover for example; would it invoke the same feelings in you if you were gazing back at a computer-generated render of everyone's favourite plumber? Exactly.

Enjoy the magazine





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Nintendo proves you can teach an old plumber new tricks



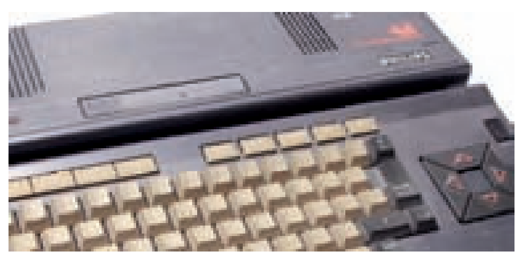


86 R-TYPE

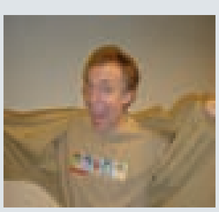
Irem exclusively reveals how its legendary shoot-'em-up came to be

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A machine that's both a console and a computer? That will never sell. Will it?



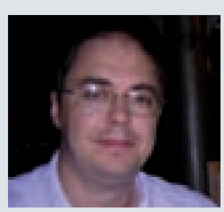
This month we've been chatting to…



44 EUGENE JARVIS
Physically draining, *Robotron: 2084* is one of the greatest shooters of all time, but why is it so special? Developer Eugene Jarvis holds all the answers…



50 DAVID FOX
It's LucasArts' funniest adventures but there isn't a pirate in sight. David Fox explains why *Zak McKracken* has a special disliking for alien mindbenders.



92 NICK PELLING
Cavemen have been in platformers for years, but *Frak!* is one of the earliest and best. Creator Nick Pelling explains the origins of his prehistoric hero.

> "Some of the slickest 2D graphics to ever beam from the SNES"
>
> Stuart Hunt



48 THE CLASSIC GAME

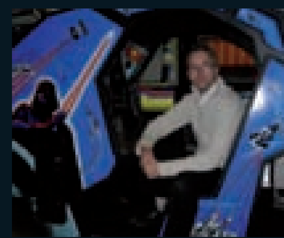
We strap on our boxing gloves and get in the ring with the mighty *Super Punch-Out*!

60 A SHOCK TO THE SYSTEM

How *System Shock 2* changed FPSs forever



ESSENTIALS



RETRO RATED

retro GAMER.net READER'S REVIVAL



22 THE OOZE

Reader John Delaney explains why this innovative puzzle/platformer from Sega Technical Institute rarely ever impresses him.

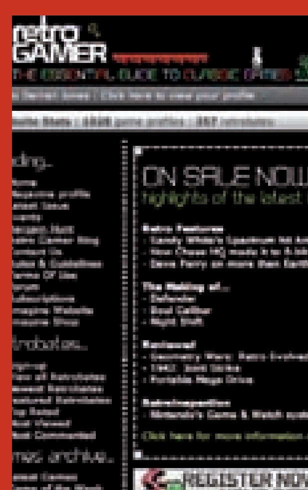




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IT'S TIME TO START (OUT) RUNNING

GREATEST RACER OF ALL TIME™ HEADS TO LIVE ARCADE AND PLAYSTATION NETWORK

Say what you like about Sega, but it certainly knows how to awaken the child within us. *Sonic Unleashed* may not have been the game we were hoping for and *NiGHTS: Journey Of Dreams* occasionally lost its way, but we still hold an abnormally large candle for Sega.

Maybe it's because Stefan McGarry is one of the most genuinely nice blokes working in the PR industry, or it could be down to the fact that the Sega Master System was the very first console Darran bought (it came with *Safari Hunt* and *Hang On*), but there's something about Sega that makes us feel all happy inside, even though we've experienced the gaming horror that is *Shadow The Hedgehog* first hand.

Sonic Unleashed turned out to be something of a disappointment (check out our review on page 99), but we've every confidence that *OutRun Online Arcade* – recently announced by Sega – is going to be the greatest racing game of 2009, even though we're only in February. So how can we be so confident when we were saying similar things about *Sonic Unleashed*? Simple, you just need to look at the following facts:

1) *OutRun 2 SP* is easily the greatest arcade racer of all time, and seeing as this is essentially a high-definition port of the hit arcade game, there's very little reason to expect this outing to be any different.

2) Coding duties are being handled by the dependable Sumo Digital. The boys from Sheffield certainly know a thing or two about making racing games and have already been behind two excellent *OutRun* offerings for home systems and the PSP – *OutRun 2* and *OutRun 2006: Coast 2 Coast* – so the franchise is in very safe hands.

3) It's not going to be a full price release. This is very important, as people usually spend £40 on the home versions of *OutRun 2* and then wonder why it's not a long, boring grindfest of car tweaking like *Gran Turismo* or *Forza Motorsport*. Moving this to the likes of Xbox Live Arcade, offering a price of no more than a tenner and properly promoting the hell out of it should ensure that The Greatest Racing Game Of All Time™ gets all the sales it needs in order to please Sega and hopefully allow the development of future Sega racers such as *Daytona* and *Scud Race*.

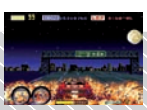
4) Additional *OutRun* goodness in the form of unlockable goodies. Although Sumo has said very little other than this will be a high-def arcade port of *OutRun 2 SP*, it has hinted that 'other stuff' will be included. *OutRun 2* and *Coast 2 Coast* were full of great extras, so expect this online conversion to follow suit.

Of course, while we're absolutely ecstatic about Sega and Sumo's announcement, it's important to remember that the biggest draw of *OutRun Online Arcade* – the online racing – has always been the weakest aspect of the gameplay in past iterations. Granted, it gets fixed eventually, but you only have to see the issues that plagued *GTI Club Plus* on its release to realise that there could be initial teething problems. On the other hand, we're confident that Sumo won't want to drop the ball on this precious licence, particularly as it's already keen on making similar updates for *Daytona* and *After Burner*. Fingers crossed everybody.

OutRun Timeline



OUTRUN
Year Released: 1986
Version: Arcade



TURBO OUTRUN
Year Released: 1989
Version: Arcade



OUTRUNNERS
Year Released: 1993
Version: Arcade



OUTRUN 2019
Year Released: 1993
Version: Mega Drive



OUTRUN 2
Year Released: 2003
Version: Xbox



OUTRUN 2006: COAST 2 COAST
Year Released: 2006
Version: PSP

FREE RADICAL FREE FALL

TIMESPLITTERS STUDIO GOES INTO ADMINISTRATION


» Free Radical Design's last game, *Haze*, didn't do very well at all, leaving both the game-buying public and industry very unimpressed.

The credit crunch has certainly been biting down in recent times, with Free Radical Design being one of the first videogame developers to receive a very painful nip. Perhaps best known for being formed from some of the key people who worked on Rare's *GoldenEye* and *Perfect Dark*, the company quickly formed a reputation with its frantically paced *TimeSplitters* franchise, the impressive *Second Sight* and the poorly received *Haze* for the PlayStation 3, which is currently sitting on a very average 55% at Metacritic.

The news was initially unveiled on 18 December when websites reported that the locks had been changed on the building and that staff were being turned away by security. It has since been revealed that the company has gone into administration with only 40 of the 185 staff remaining in employment (although many of them are now working from home).

Co-founders Steve Ellis and David Doak explained how they had been looking for a publisher for *TimeSplitters 4* but had found no success either in Europe or the United States and it's since been revealed that the secret *Star Wars* project the company had been working on for LucasArts (*Battlefront III*) is now in the hands of Rebellion.

Despite these difficult times, Steve Ellis has since announced that he has formed a brand new company with David Doak called Pumpkin Beach. As well as having a registered website, it has also been revealed that Ellis and Doak will handpick around 20 staff from Free Radical for their new venture. Little more is known at this time. More news as and when we get it.

OTHER **BRITISH COMPANIES** WE'VE LOST OVER THE YEARS

OCEAN SOFTWARE

Founded: 1984
Closed: 1998
Notable Games: *Head Over Heels, Chase H.Q., RoboCop*

Easily one of the most famous British development teams and publishers, Ocean was formed by David Ward and Jon Woods. Although earlier licences were of questionable quality, this soon improved and it ended up producing some fantastic arcade conversions and film licences.

GREMLIN GRAPHICS

Founded: 1984
Closed: 2003
Notable Games: *Wanted: Monty Mole, Thing On A Spring, Jack The Nipper, Bounder*

First formed in 1984 by Ian Stewart and Kevin Norburn, Gremlin instantly rose to prominence thanks to great releases like *Jack The Nipper, Thing On A Spring* and the excellent *Monty Mole* franchise. Bought by Infogrames in 1999, many of its staff moved to Sumo Digital in 2003.

PALACE SOFTWARE

Founded: 1983
Closed: 1991
Notable Games: *Cauldron, Barbarian, The Sacred Armour Of Antiriad*

Peter Stone and Richard Leinfellner's first Palace release was a videogame adaptation of *The Evil Dead*. It found huge success in the late-Eighties with the likes of *Cauldron* and *Barbarian: The Ultimate Warrior*, but was eventually sold to French publisher Titus in 1991.

IMAGINE SOFTWARE

Founded: 1982
Closed: 1984
Notable Games: *Hyper Sports, Renegade, Arkanoid, Target: Renegade*

When Mark Butler and Dave Lawson formed Imagine in 1982 little could they have known that the dream would all fall spectacularly apart just 18 months later. Famous for its implosion on the BBC's *Commercial Breaks*, Imagine was in financial ruin and was quickly snapped up by Ocean Software.

US GOLD

Founded: 1984
Closed: 1996
Notable Games: *Impossible Mission, World Cup Carnival, Strider, Beach Head*

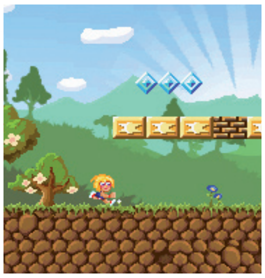
US Gold was initially set up in Birmingham by Geoff Brown with the express interest in publishing American games in the UK. Despite securing strong licences from the likes of LucasArts and Capcom, the company eventually went under in 1996.

GRAFTGOLD

Founded: 1983
Closed: 1998
Notable Games: *Gribbly's Day Out, Uridium, Paradroid, Rainbow Islands*

Steve Turner set up Graftgold then hired friend Andrew Braybrook after he realised the fledgling company was too much for one man to handle. Famed for its excellent conversions it eventually folded when it couldn't secure a buyer for its last project *Hard Corps*.

LAST-MINUTE NEWS



Ironically, the *Super Mario Bros.* rip-off will be appearing on the Nintendo DS.

IT'S A ME, GIANA

Now this is interesting stuff. *Great Giana Sisters* – the classic *Super Mario Bros.* clone that was originally available on the Commodore 64 and Amiga before Nintendo infamously made its developers pull it from shelves – is set to return. On Nintendo's DS no less!

Set to bounce on to shelves this June, courtesy of publisher dtp Entertainment, *The Great Giana Sisters* boasts updated visuals, remixed music and interaction with the DS's touch screen and microphone. It's going to be interesting to see how *The Great Giana Sisters* fares on Nintendo's handheld, particularly as so many excellent platformers are already available, but that doesn't mean we don't want to find out.

RYGAR WiiTURNS

CLASSIC TECMO HERO DOES THE WAGGLE ON Wii



This is a shot from the PS2 original, but other than a sleeker, more anime look, we're expecting the Wii release of *Rygar* to look pretty much identical.

Ever since we heard that Tecmo was making a new *Rygar* game we've been eagerly waiting for further updates. Well, new information is finally with us and although it's not a brand new game per se, we're still looking forward to the finished product (which should be available in the next couple of months).

Rygar: The Battle Of Argus is essentially an update of a PlayStation 2 game known as *Rygar: The Legendary Adventure* that was first released in 2002. Don't let that put you off, though, as it was a surprisingly polished game – think *Devil May Cry* crossed with *God Of War* – that's sure to get more interest now that an update is due for release on the currently bestselling platform.

Although it looks extremely similar graphically to the PlayStation 2 original, Tecmo has revealed a number of new features, including a variety of new enemies and bosses to fight and a brand new control system that utilises the Wii's motion sensors. Considering the hero's main weapon of choice is a huge spiked yo-yo, expect much arm swinging when *Rygar: The Battle Of Argus* eventually arrives later this year.

IF IT AIN'T BROKEN…

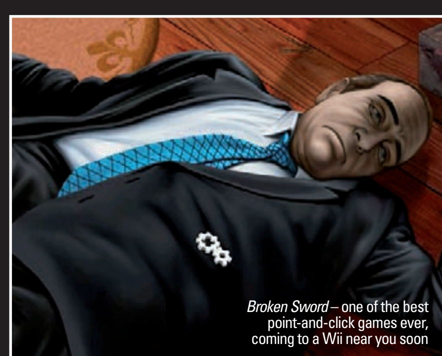
REVOLUTION SOFTWARE REVEALS A NEW BROKEN SWORD TITLE

***Broken Sword* is still widely regarded as one of the best point-and-click adventures to ever come out of the UK, so imagine how excited we were when we discovered that the classic adventure is set to return. Due to be published by Ubisoft, *Broken Sword: The Shadow Of The Templars – The Director's Cut* (to give it its full title), is being created specifically for the DS and Wii and is set to appear sometime in March.**

As well as making excellent use of the DS touch screen and the Wii's motion controls, this new update to the classic series also starts from a brand new perspective. Unlike the original game, which placed you in the shoes of amiable American George Stobbart, *The Director's Cut* begins with the player controlling French journalist Nico Collard. New locations, puzzles and enhanced visuals have also been revealed, while Dave Gibbons will be on animation duties, making Nico, George and the many characters they encounter more expressive than ever before.

"Through Dave's animated faces, the game's characters are portrayed as empathetic and emotional – driving the narrative in a way that has never been done before in an adventure game," revealed Charles Cecil, Revolution Software's founder. "*The Director's Cut* has allowed me to deliver my true vision for the series."

Broken Sword last made an official appearance on Nintendo's Game Boy Advance, while an impressive fan effort called *Broken Sword 2.5: The Return Of The Templars* was released last September. Let's hope this update sells by the bucket load, though, as it could mean the return of other classic point-and-click adventures, by both Revolution Software and other studios such as the legendary LucasArts.



Broken Sword – one of the best point-and-click games ever, coming to a Wii near you soon

The Broken Sword Timeline



BROKEN SWORD: THE SHADOW OF THE TEMPLARS
Year Released: 1996
Version: DOS



BROKEN SWORD II: THE SMOKING MIRROR
Year Released: 1997
Version: DOS

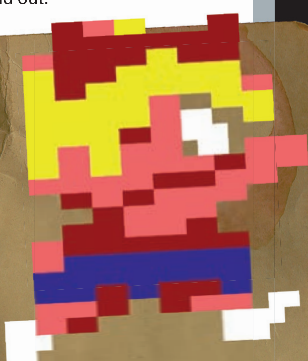


BROKEN SWORD: THE SLEEPING DRAGON
Year Released: 2003
Version: PC



BROKEN SWORD: THE ANGEL OF DEATH
Year Released: 2006
Version: PC

HERO OF THE MONTH



GIANA GIANA

HERO OF THE MONTH

Every month, **Retro Gamer** looks back at a classic videogame hero or heroine. This month it's the turn of Giana Giana.

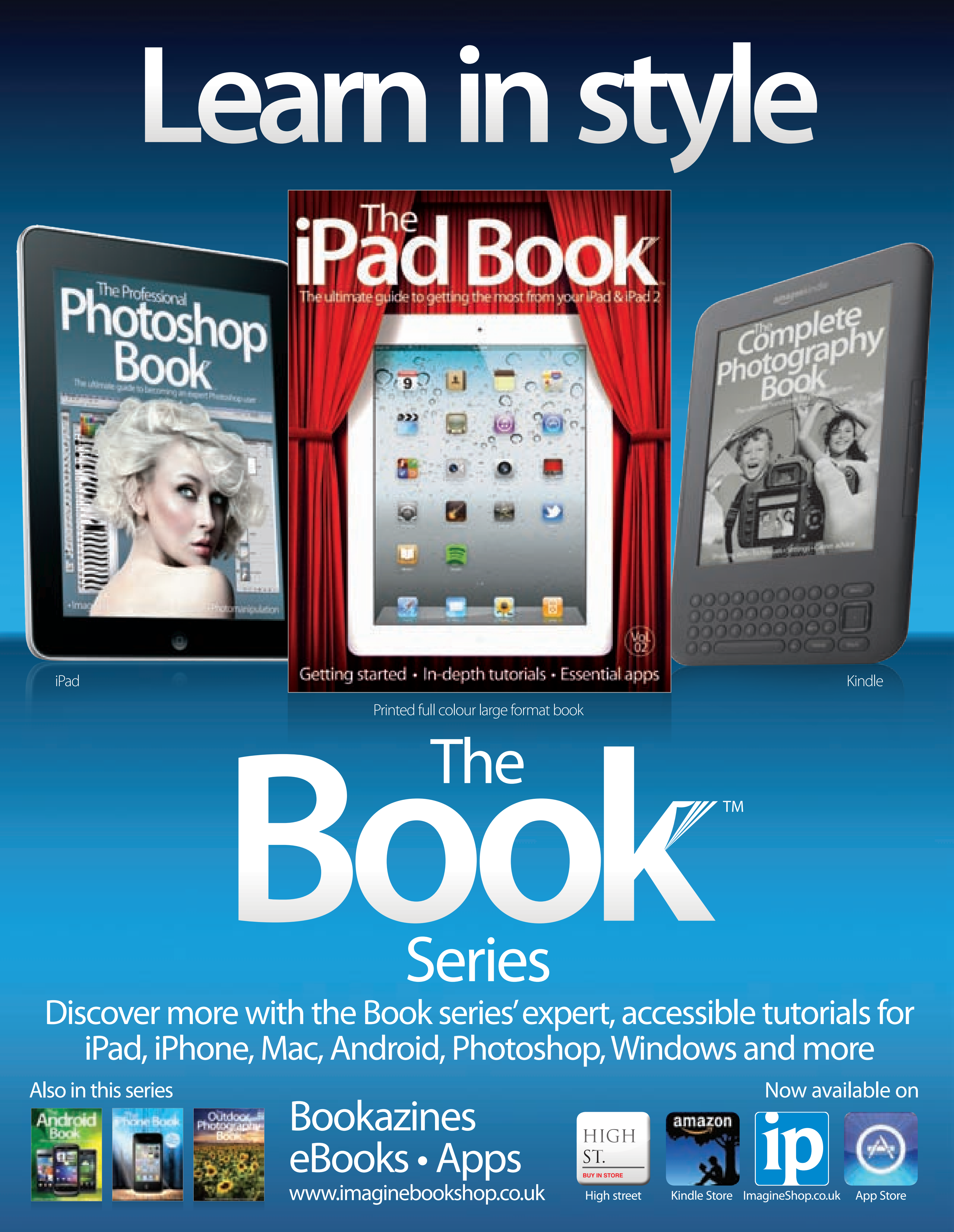
First appearance: *The Great Giana Sisters*

Weapon of choice: Garish Mohawk

Most likely to: Get pulled from store shelves

Least likely to: Get released on a Nintendo console. Wait a minute…

Unusual fact: Swedish band Machinae Supremacy feature a song on one of their albums called *The Great Giana Sisters*. Guess what it's inspired by…



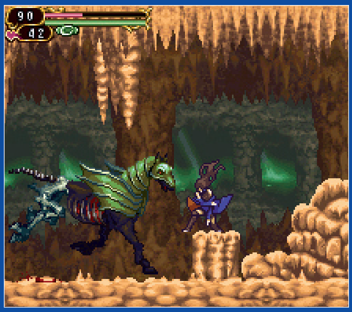
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THINGS TO LOOK FORWARD TO…

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Just because **Retro Gamer** looks to the past doesn't mean there aren't plenty of games and events to look forward to. Every month we list all the exciting games and events for you to add to your 'to do' list



FEBRUARY

CASTLEVANIA: ORDER OF ECCLESIA

Released: 6 February
Publisher: Konami
Price: £29.99
Format: DS

Talk about saving the best till last. It's been a lengthy wait, but we can safely confirm that *Order Of Ecclesia* is the best handheld *Castlevania* that we've ever played. Beautifully structured and with some truly astounding – and challenging – bosses, it's a great return to form that nearly rivals *Symphony Of The Night*. Amazing scenes.



FEBRUARY

CHRONO TRIGGER

Released: 6 February
Publisher: Square Enix
Price: £29.99
Format: DS

Final Fantasy III and *IV* were great updates for the DS, so we can't wait to see what Square Enix achieves with *Chrono Trigger*. One of Square's and the SNES's best RPGs, this update features similar 2D sprites but will utilise the DS's touch and dual screens to create a new experience. Add the cut-scenes from the PlayStation upgrade and the end result is another killer update from Square Enix.



FEBRUARY

BIONIC COMMANDO

Released: 13 February
Publisher: Capcom
Price: £34.99-£49.99
Format: Xbox 360, PS3, PC

Grin might not be that well-known a name within the industry, but we were very impressed with its excellent Xbox Live Arcade offering *Bionic Commando Rearmed*. Seemingly based on the *Lost Planet* engine, this already looks like it's captured the spirit of the NES original, even if the viewpoint is completely new. Now everyone buy it so Capcom decides to make a brand new *Strider*.



FEBRUARY

STREET FIGHTER IV

Released: 20 February
Publisher: Capcom
Price: £39.99-£49.99
Format: Xbox 360, PS3, PC

Okay this is just getting stupid now. We're really pleased that Darran loves Street Fighter IV so much, but we just don't understand why he can't just work in normal clothes. Ever since declaring Zangief to be the best character in the game, he now comes to work in nothing more than tight red shorts and a mohawk. Believe us, it is not a pretty sight. Not by a long shot.



FEBRUARY

SEGA MEGA DRIVE ULTIMATE COLLECTION

Released: 27 February
Publisher: Sega
Price: £29.99
Format: Xbox 360, PS3

Sometimes we wish we were Stefan McGarry, mainly because the lucky git is head of Sega PR and gets to see amazing compilations like this before we do. Indeed, this has 'must buy' all over it. 40 classic Mega Drive games, emulation duties by the excellent Backbone Entertainment, and a plethora of secret Master System and arcade games to unlock. Wow!



MARCH

GAUNTLET

Released: 7 March
Publisher: Eidos
Price: £29.99
Format: DS

Another DS game that slipped into this year. Like *Castlevania: Order Of Ecclesia*, we've been really enjoying *Gauntlet*, so it saddens us that Backbone Entertainment's game has suffered such a big delay. Maybe it was so it can include arcade-perfect ports of the original games, but it was probably just to ensure that it didn't get lost in the Christmas rush. Regardless, it's definitely a title to keep an eye on.



MARCH

SONIC AND THE BLACK KNIGHT

Released: 13 March
Publisher: Sega
Price: £29.99
Format: Wii

Does Sonic really need to wield a sword in his latest adventure? We worry about this as surely the next step is to give him a gun, stick him in a low rider and get him to perform driveby shootings on Dr Robotnik (Eggman still sounds silly to us). Still Sonic's quest for the Secret Rings turned out to be pretty good fun, so we're not losing hope just yet. After all, it's a Sega game and we love Sega.



MARCH

POPULOUS

Released: 27 March
Publisher: Rising Star Games
Price: £29.99
Format: DS

Considering Electronic Arts owns the rights to *Populous*, it's somewhat worrying that it's not publishing one of its own games. While we've not played the Japanese version, many reviews suggested that it suffered from the same issues – fiddly control, cramped playing area – that befell the original *SimCity DS* release. Hopefully these issues won't appear once the UK version finally arrives. Time to cross those fingers.

MAILBAG

HAVE YOUR SAY… SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – **WWW.RETROGAMER.NET**



» **Loki feels that we were rather harsh on the Mega Drive conversion of *Revolution X*, so we reluctantly played through it again. We stand by our original statement.**

ZONED OUT

Dear Retro Gamer,
In your excellent Twilight Games Zone feature in issue 58, you suggested that *Momoko 120%* might be based on a manga about a very dangerous high school. This is sort of almost right, in a complicated – and rather boring – way.

It's actually a port of a NES game called *Urusei Yatsura: Lum's Wedding Bell*, which is based on the manga *Urusei Yatsura*, although it's about a lecherous loser who accidentally gets married to an alien princess in a tiger fur bikini. *[– You what? ED]*

The NES game also features a burning high school and, for some reason, the character starts off as a baby and ages with each stage. I guess they must have lost the licence when it came to making the arcade version.

As for *Revolution X*, while the SNES, Saturn, PlayStation and arcade versions are horrible and near-unplayable, for some reason the Mega Drive version isn't actually too bad. It still doesn't make any sense, though, with bosses including a big green skull and a hovering office desk equipped with rocket launchers.
Loki Valhalla

Thanks for the trivia, Loki. We've since sent Stuart out to sample the delights of *Urusei Yatsura: Lum's Wedding Bell*, and to catch up on the anime as well. He said the NES version was so bad it actually felt like spending an afternoon with a lecherous loser wearing a tiger fur bikini, and has since set his NES alight. As for *Revolution X*, the Mega Drive version probably is one of the better versions you can come by, but that's like saying stepping in a dog turd is better than waking up next to one.

STAR LETTER

PAC-ATTACK





Dear Retro Gamer,
I know you're not big fans of mobile gaming, which is a shame as there are some real gems out there on mobile phones that are honestly worth checking out.

I work in the mobile industry and I luckily have access to phones, including broken and/or faulty ones, that would normally get scrapped for spares, so over the last year, on odd weekends and evenings, I have built a working *Pac-Man* arcade machine, albeit in miniature form. It stands about six inches tall, the cabinet has been built from foam board, and the guts' main gubbins come from an old Sharp mobile phone.

I managed to replicate the original graphics by visiting Local Arcade, a brilliant website for people looking for artwork for building their own cabs, and I'm really pleased with the end results.

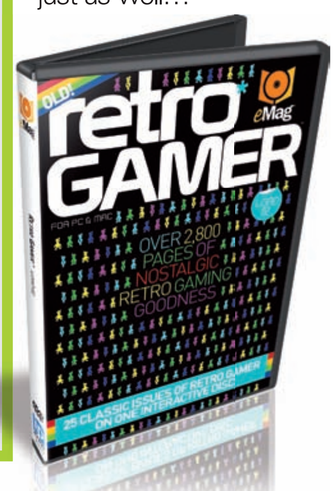
The only real downside is that I can't make calls on it. I'd definitely love to be able to, though, if only to see the look on people's faces.

Hope you enjoy!
Regards,
Paul Jacobson

That's absolutely fantastic stuff, Paul, and it always amazes us when we see the lengths that some of our readers will go to when covering their hobby. The only things you forget to include in your letter were details about the high score you've managed to achieve on it and when you plan to send us a machine of our very own. In the meantime, here's the second volume of our eMag. You deserve it.

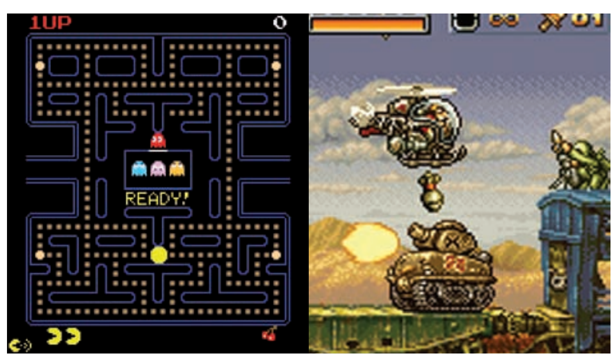
WIN!

Every month, one lucky reader will receive a copy of our brand new eMag, Retro Gamer Load 2, a bargain if ever there was one. All you have to do is present a lucid, thought-provoking piece of literature that melts our souls. Failing that, something funny with swear words or something Strider-related will go down just as well…



MOBILE MOAN

Dear Retro Gamer,
It's not often that I feel the urge to complain about something, but your continual lack of support for the mobile phone market is beginning to really upset. Phone games have come along in massive leaps and bounds over the past five years, particularly with the release of Apple's excellent iPhone, and I really think you're missing a trick by not covering these titles within your pages. Plenty of classic arcade games like *Final Fight*, *Pac-Man*, and *Space Invaders* have been successfully converted to a whole variety of systems now,



» **Titles like *Pac-Man* and *Metal Slug Mobile* prove that the phone market still has plenty to offer retro gamers.**



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Next month: Tony Crowther



>> BURNING QUESTION?

HAVE YOU ever had a burning question that you've always wanted to ask? Do you often sit at your computer desk wondering if David Braben will ever patch things up with Ian Bell or if Matthew Smith checks into hotels as Miner Willy? If you do, then head on over to our forums where you can put your burning questions to whoever we're interviewing. The best questions will then get answered and revealed in the next issue. Visit the forum now at www.retrogamer.net/forum

and many of them are not only arcade perfect but play like a dream as well.

I'm sure fellow readers would love to see more mobile coverage in the new year, so how about making more of an effort, guys? It would make my year.

David Stone, via email

You'll be happy to know, David, that we will be including more mobile phone coverage throughout the new year. A round-up of retro-themed iPhone/iPod touch games will appear in the very next issue, and we're also looking at the possibility of a monthly mobile section as well. We're fully aware that there are a great number of classic games available on these systems, so expect to see more reviews and features in coming issues.

OCARINA STILL IMPRESSES

Dear Retro Gamer,

Ten years ago I received *The Legend Of Zelda: Ocarina Of Time* as a Christmas present from my then-girlfriend. A decade later, and being delighted at discovering it was available for download on my Wii, I once again made the trip into Link's wonderful world.

It looks a little rough around the edges now, even with those clean filters, but by goodness is the gameplay still amazing. I spent virtually an entire weekend on the damn thing – much to my wife's disgust, who was itching to play *Wii Fit* – and it's every bit as good as I remember. Taking in the sheer vastness of Hyrule Field, your sad farewell with Saria, the discovery of Zelda's secret identity, riding Epona, exploring the Water Temple… the greatness never stops.

In fact, so utterly enthralled have I been with *Ocarina Of Time* that my brand new copy of *Twilight Princess* hasn't even been unwrapped yet! So anyway, aside from wanting to know if you've all had a great Christmas, I was also wondering if you've also rediscovered old classics you used to enjoy playing on the new consoles.

Bob Hall, via email



>> One of these games became an instant classic overnight, the other proved to be an enjoyable, but not quite as good, sequel. Can you guess which is which?

It's funny you should mention this, Bob, because Darran has recently been playing through *Twilight Princess* and has been moaning that it's not a patch on *Ocarina Of Time* – although, to be fair, that's a very hard game to top.

Anyway, as far as your question goes, Stuart has actually been playing quite a lot of *Sensible World Of Soccer* on Xbox Live Arcade, while Darran still manages to take time out of his busy schedule to play *Rez* at least once a week.

> "Phone games have come along in massive leaps and bounds over the past five years, particularly with the release of Apple's excellent iPhone"

RETROBATE PROFILE

Retrobate Profile



Name:	Duncan Rule
Joined:	27th Oct 2008
Location:	Cambridge
Occupation:	Academic publishing
Website:	Not given
Fav Games System:	PC - DOS
Bio:	Retro gamer and FPS enthusiast.

HOMEBREW HEAVEN

Dear Retro Gamer,

I just wanted to write in and say how much I enjoy the new homebrew section of your magazine. Everything feels fresh and exciting, it's now possible to read the actual scores, and you've been able to cram an insane >>

BEAT THE TEAM

Think you're good at retro games? Then see if you can beat the staff at some of their favourite games

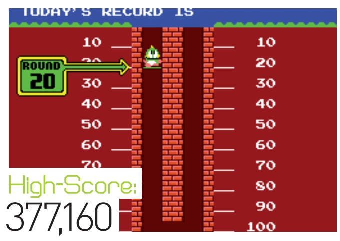


DARRAN

CHOSEN GAME: BUBBLE BOBBLE

Why I picked it: It's a wonderful platformer with hundreds of secrets to uncover.

Handy advice: Group up bubbles for bonuses.



High-Score: 377,160

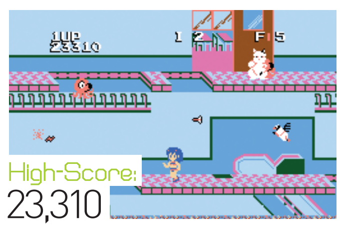


STUART

CHOSEN GAME: URUSEI YATSURA: LUM'S WEDDING BELL

Why I picked it: Just to prove that I did play the game.

Handy advice: This game loves to be cheap. Take your time; consideration is the key.



High-Score: 23,310



ASH

CHOSEN GAME: MR DRILLER

Why I picked it: Because Namco makes the best score-attack games around and *Mr Driller* is one of the very best examples.

Handy Advice: Aim to collect all of the air bubbles without losing a life. It's not easy.



High-Score: 325,095

From the Forum

» To have your say visit www.retrogamer.net/forum

Every month, Retro Gamer asks a question on the forum and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…

What is your favourite vertical shooter?

ID: Overheat
I doubt this will be a popular choice, but I have very fond memories of *Battle Squadron* for the Amiga. It was the first game I ever owned on the Amiga (my 1500) and I must have played it hundreds of times. Great fun on two-player too!

ID: HEAVYface
Never understood the allure of verticality. I prefer it hard and horizontal.

ID: Havantgottaclue
Well, you're spoilt for choice if you have a Saturn, but I think I'd go with *DoDonPachi*, if only because I'm so rubbish at *Radiant Silvergun*.

ID: Bub&Bob
As it doesn't say scrolling, I will go for *Arcadia* (C64 or Vic20). Very tough but great fun.

ID: bolda
As much as I would like to see the comically named and thoroughly enjoyable *Hotdog Storm* get a mention, my head says that *DoDonPachi* is vertical shmup perfection: the main reason I bought an X-Arcade stick!

ID: thl
I'd say *Power Strike* for the Master System. It had a huge range of weapons to choose from, whether it's the swing web, pulse ball, or wipe laser. Nicely presented on the 8-bit console, but the difficulty level was a pain!

ID: Gnome
Definitely the original *Raiden*, preferably played on a battered arcade machine, ages ago and on the island of Hydra. T'was illegal to be underage in the arcades back then, mind.

ID: felgekarp
Slap Fight. Stupid name, decent power-ups, and great tune.

ID: shifter
It just has to be *Galaga*. Nothing comes close. Well… there are lots, actually, that are maybe better, but nothing captivated me like *Galaga* to the point of the table-top machine in a hotel in Cyprus while on honeymoon!

ID: The Master
M0000000 00000000000000N CRESTAAAAAAA AAAAAAAAAA!!!!!

God alone knows how many ten pence pieces I lost to this as a kid, or how much I exploded with joy when a BBC Micro conversion eventually surfaced. There's just something about those waves of different things that still blows me away to this day. And it was the second game after *Pac-Man* that I loaded onto my GP2X.

ID: MC1
Light Force on the Spectrum: probably the first vertical shooter I really spent any time on.

ID: Hiroke
TwinBee on the NES because it was on my 18-in-1 carts and probably the only vertical shooter I ever played.

ID: neuromancer
Capcom's brilliantly named *Side Arms Hyper Dyne*, combining vertical and horizontal elements, great multi-directional weaponry, power-ups, vibrant graphics, and insane on-screen mayhem. I was utterly addicted to this as a young teenager in 1986.

ID: AmigaJay
It has to be *Shoot-'Em-Up Construction Kit* on the Amiga. It is still one of the best vertical shooter creation kits available, and with a bit of time anyone can create a half-decent vertical shooter.

ID: Seadog74
A big fan of *Sidewinder* and *SWIV* on the Amiga, but my choice is *Mission Genocide* on the Amstrad. It was a budget game from Firebird that was better than most of the full-price shooters at the time.

ID: DPrinny
Does it count if the monitor or TV is on its side? Then they're all vertical.

ID: Confessor
I'm undecided between *Espial* – a *Xevious* rip-off – and *Megazone*.

ID: K9Spheres
Star Soldier on the NES was great, although I am loving *Star Soldier R* on the Wii at the moment. It's short and sweet, but it's really addictive. I just wish that I was able to score more than 1 million points on the two-minute game.

ID: Doddsy
For me, *Galaxian*. This took the *Space Invaders* formula further by adding colourful graphics and kamikaze aliens.

ID: boggyb68
For me it's a dead heat between *River Raid* on the Atari 2600 and *Astrosmash* on the Intellivision. Both vertical shooters par excellence!

YOUR OPINION PLEASE!

LAST BOSS AGONY

Nesmaster: In the past few weeks I find myself playing a game up until the last boss and dying! It's very frustrating to do all that hard work and then get killed on the last boss and go back to the start of the game!

So have you had any last boss agony?

clarance: *Soccer Kid* on the Amiga. Couldn't get past the Russian level boss. No cheat codes either.

Shadowman: Plenty of bosses have given me grief over the years, including any SNK *KOF* boss created after 2000. Zero at the end of *KOF2000* is the last final boss in a *KOF* game I can consistently beat, then SNK went OTT with the cheapness, which has spoilt my single-player playthroughs.

Antiriad2097: Recently got to the last battle in *Shadow Of The Colossus*, and at that point it just stops being fun. It goes from being inventive design to turgid repetition.

paranoid marvin: *XIII* had a stupidly ridiculous last level bad guy who takes a while even with infinite energy. Ditto *Mafia*.

BEST CONTROLS

Bub&Bob: *Resident Evil 4* on the Wii is the game, above all others, where I instantly felt "yeah, these controls are spot on"

STranger81: Probably in the minority here but im going to go with the arcade version of *Mortal Kombat*. The fairly loose controls suit the game perfectly IMO.

pottyboy: The control system used by Dragon Blade on the Wii is quite neat. The nunchuk is used for moving your character, whilst the remote is used for all your hacking and slashing!

tobytyke: *Street Fighter II* in the arcade. Buttons all over the place but after you get to grips it just seems to work.

sscott: *Excite Truck* on the Wii, a joypad wouldn't be the same.

liveinabin: The dual stick controls in *Katamari Damacy* are just perfect. Also, *Ridge Racer* on PSP. They somehow made a great driving tool from that stubby badly placed ana*log 'nub' thing.*

BEST BAT MAN

Type2XS: I loved *Bat Man the Movie* on C64 as well as on the Amiga. I liked the first *Bat Man* game on the Game Boy too. Never played any of the newer titles though…

James Bond: I really like *Bat Man Returns* on the SNES, though I liked *The Adventures of Bat Man & Robin* better, a very well made game, lovely graphics and a joy to play, you really must check it out. Isn't it quite rare on the Mega CD?

The Master: Which was the one that you got packaged in a nice *Bat Man* box with Amigas from Silica? That one.

nemerodius: The best *Bat Man* I have ever played was on the NES by Sunsoft. The Game Boy 1990 release was also very decent.

moshboy: The only one I ever got to play was one for the Amiga and I wasn't awfully impressed at the time.

Old VS NEW

Each month we'll be finding out if the classics are better than their current-gen successors. This month we pit Tomb Raider against Lara's latest…

Tomb Raider



Tomb Raider: Underworld



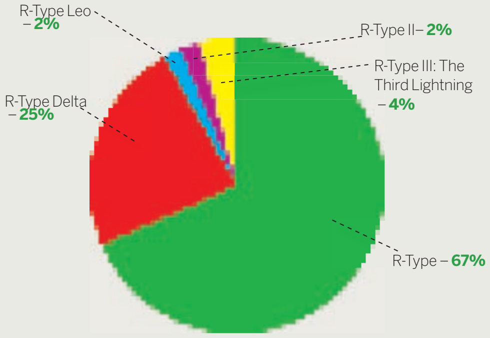
73% | 27%

paranoid marvin – The original was a revelation

Dudley – The new one is vastly better than the first one

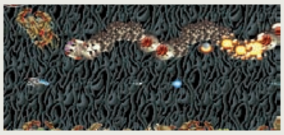
HOT TOPIC

What's your favourite R-Type? Head on over to page 86 where you can read about the making of this iconic blaster.



"The first one without a doubt. There was nothing else like it at the time" **– Seadog74**

"*R-Type Delta* was a great twist on the original. One of the best PSone games you can buy…" **– AfterbuN003**



amount of information onto each page. Talk about value for money! I was a little upset to see the Homebrew Heroes getting relegated to a single page, but the return of the remakes section more than makes up for it.

What I would like to know, though, is if you'll consider expanding this section in future issues, as it's easily one of my favourite sections of the magazine. Although I've done a little dabbling myself, I'm not really much of a coder, but I do have a great deal of respect for those people who are prepared to put so much of their free time into the games that I enjoy playing. Giving this section more coverage would be a nice way of acknowledging the hard work these people constantly give back to the community.

Kevin Jacobs, Hants

HOMEBREW HELL

Dear Retro Gamer,

Please, please, please stop all this pointless coverage of homebrew games in your magazine. **Retro Gamer** should be about covering genuine classics from legendary coders, not looking at some piece of tat from a nameless nobody who has spent the last three years of their lives working on a new Spectrum game that no one really cares about.

It was bad enough when it was just two pages of reviews, but these new Homebrew Heroes that spend two pages dedicated to someone I haven't even heard of are even worse. Stop it now before it's too late.

Greg Talbot, via email

Well, well, well, Greg, you do seem to have a bee in your bonnet. While you might not like homebrew games, surely you can at least appreciate the hard work that these people actually put into their projects? While we don't really agree with your views on Homebrew Heroes, you'll have no doubt noticed that the feature is now confined to a single page. Far too many people actually enjoy the homebrew section – Kevin's recent letter being just one example – so the section won't be going anywhere.



Greg doesn't have any time at all for homebrew games, which is a shame, as this CPC conversion of *Frogger* is excellent.

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

Cool Boarders: Hot or not?

It's been more of an argument this month as Darran's spent most of the month constantly squabbling about the overall importance of *Cool Boarders* with Retro Gamer designer Stephen Williams. Steve's a big fan of the game and constantly bugs us to cover it in same shape or form, while Darran sits firmly in the *1080° Snowboarding* camp. Stuart is wisely keeping his mouth shut on the issue.

BUBBLE BURST

Dear Retro Gamer,

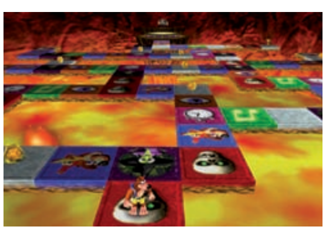
As much as I love your magazine, I can't help but be upset over your refusal to cover one of my favourite games. *Bubble Bobble* is a work of genius and I've lost count of the many hours that I spent playing it in my youth. I clocked up a huge amount of time on the Commodore 64 version as well and was really chuffed that it was so much better than the other 8-bit ports. A making of would be absolutely fantastic and would really cheer me up.

Jason Turner, via email

Are you a fairly new reader of the magazine, Jason? Stuart Campbell wrote a pretty exhaustive piece on the entire *Bubble Bobble* franchise way back in issue 28. Unfortunately, getting hold of Japanese developers can prove very tricky, but we'll keep on trying for you.

> "Bubble Bobble is a work of genius and I've lost count of the hours spent playing it"

CURRENTLY PLAYING





DARRAN

Banjo-Kazooie

I've been absolutely hammering *Banjo-Kazooie* over the last few weeks. It's received a brilliant conversion on Live Arcade and is still the second-best 3D platformer for the N64 – the first being *Mario 64*, obviously.

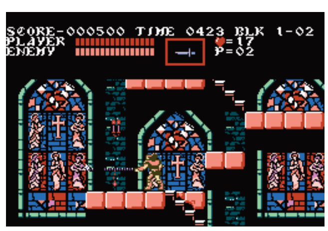




STUART

Sonic Unleashed

I'm currently forcing myself to play *Sonic Unleashed* for a review in this very issue while trying to work out how I can ever begin to forgive those responsible. Why they just couldn't make a *Sonic* game I'll never know.





ASH

Castlevania III: Dracula's Curse

This went up on the US Virtual Console this month so I finally got to play a *Castlevania* I've never tried before. The visuals are great for the NES, while the gameplay is almost as good as *Super Castlevania IV*. A pleasant surprise.

retro GAMER

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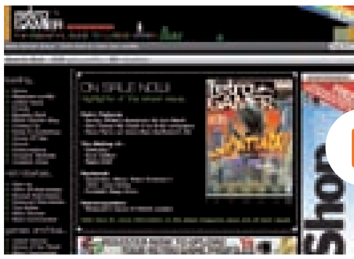
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BARGAIN HUNT

DESPERATE TO FINISH OFF YOUR RETRO COLLECTION? WANT TO GET YOUR HANDS ON ALL THE BEST BARGAINS BUT DON'T KNOW WHERE TO GO? THEN VISIT **WWW.RETROGAMER.NET/BARGAIN_HUNT.PHP** AND DISCOVER ALL THE CLASSIC MACHINES THAT YOU'LL EVER NEED

You've been asking for it forever, but we're pleased to announce a brand new look for **Retro Gamer**'s Buyer's Guide section that makes it incredibly easy to get your hands on all the best retro bargains.

Using our new search engine couldn't be easier, as all you need to do is select a manufacturer and machine from the pull-down menu. Once you've found the system you're after the magic of the internet will search eBay for the top 20 ending items, meaning that you'll be able to gauge the market's health with very little effort. This month, Darran's been on the hunt for Nintendo games.



Head on over to the excellent **retrogamer.net** and click on 'Bargain Hunt' or visit **www.retrogamer.net/bargain_hunt.php**



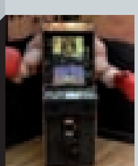
Put in the details for the greatest computer in the world and discuss with your staff writer why it's so much better than the ZX Spectrum.



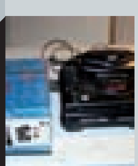
Swoon in delight as you find yourself getting ever closer to collecting all the £1.99 *Simulator* games that Codemasters ever released.

EBAY BARGAINS

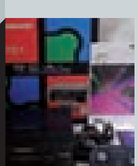
Retro Gamer has been scouring the world's most popular auction site, to find the best bargains out there…



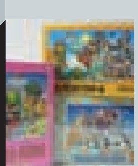
■ This *Punch-Out!!* coin-op looks in knockout condition, with cool novelty arms. The starting bid was $3,500, or you could finish it for $4,000.



■ This great lot, going for a steal with mere hours remaining, has a complete Genesis with 32 games, including *Sonic CD* and *Final Fight CD*, for $61.



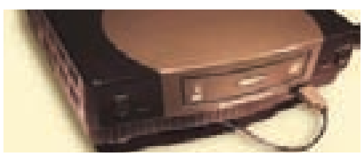
■ This nice condition 3DO was going for $31. There are some great and inexpensive games available for the machine, so this is definitely a good buy.



■ This pack, a must for any *Mario* collector, included a US copy of *Super Mario Bros* and Japanese copies its NES sequels, all in great condition for £99.99.

3DO

3DO GOLDSTAR	£45+ ($81+)
PANASONIC FZ-1 (FRONT LOADER)	£40+ ($74+)
PANASONIC FZ-10 (TOP LOADER)	£20+ ($37+)



ACORN

ARCHIMEDES	£30 ($55)
ATOM	£50 ($92)
ACORN ELECTRON	£10 ($18)
BBC MICRO	£15 ($28)



AMSTRAD

CPC 464	£10+ ($18+)
CPC 664	£90+ ($165+)
CPC 6128	£25+ ($46+)
GX4000	£50+ ($92+)

APPLE

APPLE II	£30+ ($55+)

ATARI

400/800/600XL/XE	£20+ ($37+)
2600 (VCS)	£20+ ($37+)
5200	£30 ($55)
7800	£20+ ($37+)
JAGUAR	£20+ ($37+)
JAGUAR CD	£70 ($129)
LYNX I/II	£20+ ($37+)
ST	£20+ ($37+)

BANDAI

GUNDAM RX-78	£75+ ($138+)
PLAYDIA	£90 ($166)
PIPPIN (ATMARK)	£500+ ($921+)
WONDERSWAN	£10 ($18)
WONDERSWAN COLOR	£20 ($37)
WONDERSWAN CRYSTAL	£25 ($46)



COMMODORE

AMIGA 500/600/1200	£20+ ($37+)
C16/PLUS/4	£15+ ($28+)
C64	£10+ ($18+)
C64 GS	£30+ ($55+)
C128	£30+ ($55+)
CDTV	£20 ($37)
CD32	£25 ($46)
VIC-20	£10+ ($18+)



FUJITSU

FUJITSU FM	£100+ ($184+)
FUJITSU FM TOWNS MARTY	£200+ ($368+)



MISCELLANEOUS

BALLY ASTROCADE	£20 ($37)
BARCODE BATTLER	£5 ($18)
CASIO LOOPY	£25 ($46)
FAIRCHILD CHANNEL F	£10 ($18)
COLECOVISION	£30 ($55)
DRAGON 32/64	£8 ($15)
ARCADIA 2001	£10 ($18)
EPOCH CASSETTE VISION	£20 ($37)
EPOCH SUPER CASSETTE VISION	£30 ($55)
INTELLIVISION	£40+ ($74+)
ODYSSEY	£10 ($18)
ORIC-1	£20 ($37)
PLAYSTATION	£10 ($18)
SAM COUPÉ	£50-£200 ($92-$368)
SUPERVISION	£15 ($28)
TIGER ELEC GAME.COM	£15 ($28)
TOMY TUTOR (MK1/JR/MK2)	£10 ($18)
VECTREX (MB/GCE)	£80 ($147)
X68000	£90+ ($166+)

MSX

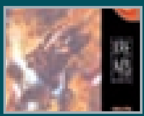
MSX 1	£10+ ($18+)
MSX 2	£20+ ($37+)
MSX 2+	£30+ ($55+)
MSX TURBO R	£30+ ($55+)

NEC

PC-6###	£10+ ($18+)

RETRO AUCTION WATCH

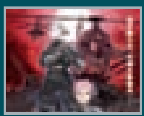
Retro Gamer sifts through the pages of eBay to report back on any items of interest, hardware or software, that caught our eyes. This month we've been looking for shmups.



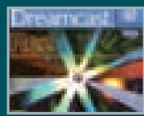
IKARUGA
System: **Dreamcast**
Normally sells for **£34.95**
Ended at **£40**



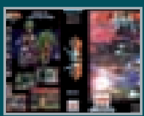
THUNDER FORCE III
System: **Mega Drive**
Normally sells for **£3**
Ended at **£3.47**



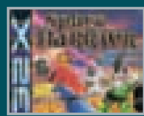
UNDER DEFEAT
System: **Neo Geo MVS**
Normally sells for **£60**
Ended at **£65**



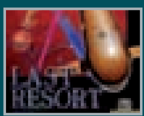
REZ
System: **Dreamcast**
Normally sells for **£30**
Ended at **£27.16**



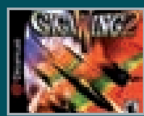
BLAZING STAR
System: **Neo Geo MVS**
Normally sells for **£80**
Ended at **£74.99**



SPACE HARRIER
System: **32X**
Normally sells for **£10**
Ended at **£9.99**



LAST RESORT
System: **Neo Geo MVS**
Normally sells for **£70**
Ended at **£64.79**



GIGA WING 2
System: **Dreamcast**
Normally sells for **£25**
Ended at **£47.60**

PC-8801	**£20 ($37)**
PC-9801	**£35 ($65)**
PC-FX	**£50 ($92)**
PC-ENGINE	**£55 ($101)**
PC-ENGINE GT	**£70+ ($129+)**
TURBOGRAFX-16	**£30 ($55)**
TURBO EXPRESS	**£50 ($92)**
SUPERGRAFX	**£80 ($147)**
PC-E CD-ROM/ TURBOGRAFX CD	**£50+ ($92+)**
PC-E DUO/ TURBO DUO	**£120 ($221)**
DUO-R	**£80 ($147)**

NINTENDO

FAMICOM	**£60 ($111)**
FAMICOM AV	**£40 ($74)**
FAMICOM DISK SYSTEM	**£70 ($129)**
SHARP FAMICOM TWIN	**£100 ($184)**
GAME & WATCH	**£1+ ($2+)**
GAME BOY B/W	**£5 ($9)**
GAME BOY POCKET	**£8 ($15)**
GAME BOY COLOR	**£12 ($22)**
GAME BOY ADVANCE	**£25 ($46)**
N64	**£10 ($18)**
N64 DD	**£150+ ($276+)**
NES (TOASTER)	**£15 ($28)**
NES (DOG BONE)	**£50 ($92)**
SNES (SUPER FAMICOM IN JAPAN)	**£20 ($37)**
SNES 2 (KNOWN AS 'JR' IN JAPAN)	**£50+ ($92+)**
VIRTUAL BOY	**£80 ($147)**



PHILIPS

CD-I	**£20+ ($37+)**
CD-I 450/500	**£30 ($55)**
VIDEOPAC G7000	**£10 ($18)**
VIDEOPAC G7400	**£20 ($37)**

SEGA

32X	**£35 ($65)**
DREAMCAST	**£25 ($46)**
GAME GEAR	**£15 ($28)**
SG-1000	**£50-£150 ($80-$260)**
SC-3000	**£50 ($92)**
MASTER SYSTEM I/II	**£10 ($18)**



AMSTRAD MEGA PC	**£10 ($18)**
TERADRIVE	**£100 ($184)**
MEGA DRIVE/ GENESIS I/II	**£25 ($46)**
GENESIS 3	**£35 ($65)**
NOMAD	**£100 ($184)**
MULTIMEGA/ WONDERMEGA/ CDX/X'EYE	**£100+ ($184+)**
MEGA-CD (SCD) I/II	**£50+ ($92+)**
PICO	**£20 ($37)**
SATURN	**£30 ($55)**
MEGA CD (SCD) I/II	**£50+ ($92+)**

SINCLAIR

ZX80	**£200 ($368)**
ZX81	**£70 ($129)**
ZX SPECTRUM 48K	**£10 ($18)**
ZX SPECTRUM 128K	**£40 ($74)**
ZX SPECTRUM+	**£35 ($65)**
ZX SPECTRUM +2	**£35 ($65)**
ZX SPECTRUM +3	**£40 ($74)**

SNK

NEO-GEO AES	**£150+ ($276+)**
NEO-GEO MVS	**£70 ($129)**
NEO-GEO CD	**£100 ($184)**
NEO-GEO CDZ	**£80+ ($147+)**
NEO-GEO POCKET	**£20 ($37)**
NEO-GEO POCKET COLOR	**£35 ($65)**

COLLECTOR'S CORNER

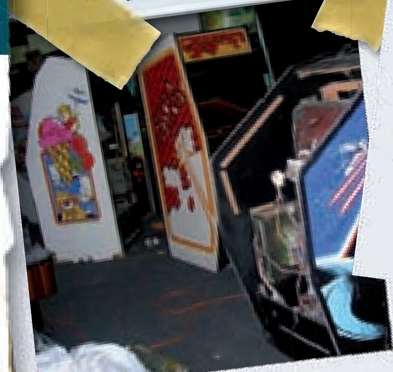
THIS ISSUE WE SPEAK TO **SHAUN MELDON**, A 39-YEAR-OLD SENIOR IT CONSULTANT FROM EXETER WHO'S GOT HIS VERY OWN PIECE OF THE AMUSEMENT PIER IN HIS BACK YARD



» I have been collecting arcade games since 1996. School holidays were often spent in the arcade rather than on the beach.



» I am now running some regular gamer evenings where people can come along and play. Details are on the **www.arcadebarn.co.uk** site, or give me a call on 07726 332871.



» This is my repair bay. Lots of games arrive here in need of work. Here we have a *Star Wars* cockpit – now working – *Super Breakout*, and *Food Fight*.



» The rarest game I have is currently being restored. This is Atari's superb Laserdisc game *Firefox*. It only made 350 cockpits and this is number 347.



» *Crystal Castles* is one of my favourite machines. It's such a nice-looking cab and is always fun to play. I love some of the newer games and have a *Daytona* twin and *Landing High Japan* to get a nice balance of old and new.



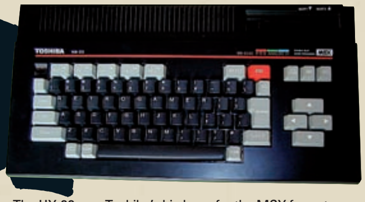
If you have a collection that you feel the rest of the **Retro Gamer** readership needs to know about then contact us at **retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk** and we'll do our best to get you in the magazine.

BACK TO THE EIGHTIES



THE LATEST NEWS FROM NOVEMBER 1985

NOVEMBER 1985 – Commodore money gloom, Amiga coming soon, MSX looking doomed, Sweevo arrives, Amstrad games don't, Cyberun released, Microsphere go Back To Skool and Trashman 3 binned. Richard Burton rummages through the bins and finds…



» The HX-22 was Toshiba's big hope for the MSX format. Would the UK embrace it lovingly? No, no it wouldn't.



» *Little Computer People* (C64): Amazing concept or dull as ditch water – you decide…



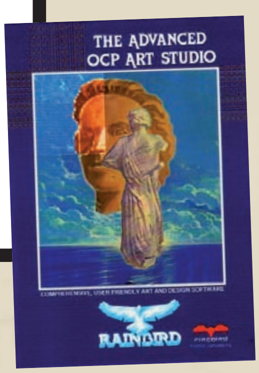
» *Blackwyche* (C64): Ultimate's C64 output was a mixed bag in regards to quality. *Blackwyche* was one of the better releases.

It was a case of good news and bad news for Commodore this month. Good news arrived with the announcement that the company would be unveiling its new micro, the Amiga, at the Which Computer? Show in mid-January. Its appearance was eagerly awaited.

Not so good was the news that Commodore had suffered substantial first quarter losses of £30 million. However, that's an improvement over the previous fourth quarter results of a loss of £96 million.

Toshiba was trying to convince everyone that the UK really did have the vaguest interest in the MSX brand with the news of its enhanced next generation MSX micro, the Toshiba HX-22. At £249 it wasn't competitively priced against the usual 8-bit suspects but Toshiba insisted that interest in its machines and the MSX format was gathering pace and that 1986 would be a great year for the format. Oh, my chin has just started itching furiously…

British Telecom, owners of Beyond and Firebird, confirmed it had created a new software division entitled Rainbird. It would deal with the more serious side of software as well as simulations, leaving Firebird with the more arcade-based titles. The company also revealed that Rainbird's first title would be the art package *Art Studio* for the Spectrum.



» *The Advanced OCP Art Studio* (Spectrum): BT's new software division, Rainbird, was to concentrate on utilities and adventures. First up was *Art Studio*.

Another new software house celebrating its first release was Alphabatim, formed by Christian Urquhart, the name behind *Daley Thompson's Decathlon*, after he decided to split from Ocean. Although its first release, *Robot Messiah* on the Spectrum, was greeted warmly on release, it was ultimately just another run-of-the-mill arcade adventure and was also the only release by the company.

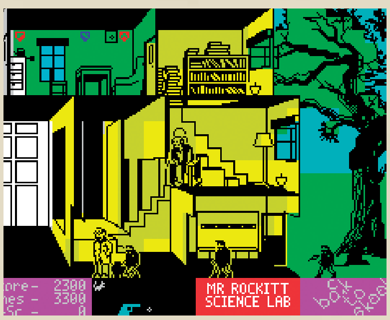
Cyberun was announced as the latest release from Ultimate. A shoot-'em-up with a collecting element, the game was due for general release in spring '86 on the Spectrum, Amstrad and, oddly, the MSX. Although the Spectrum and MSX versions were released, the CPC conversion never materialised.

C64 owners had their own piece of Ultimate joy with the impending appearance of *Blackwyche*. Set on a ghostly galleon, this atmospheric arcade adventure featured the reappearance of Sir Arthur Pendragon and rated very highly in reviews. Reality suggests it was good but not that good…

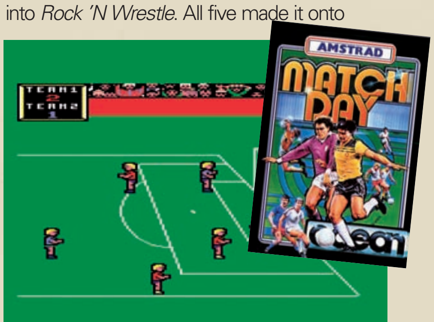
Odin Computer Graphics also had a new game out this month. *Robin Of The Wood* fell into the *Sabre Wulf* category of games (ie aimless wandering and getting lost). With pretty graphics and a big gaming area to explore, *Robin* proved to be another hit for Odin, following on from the success of its last title, *Nodes Of Yesod*. *Robin* was due to be released on the C64, Spectrum and Amstrad but, yet again, the Amstradians found their version was never completed.

And to complete a hat-trick of no-shows for the Amstrad, New Generation Software, creators of the *Trashman* games, said it was to release a third in the series some time into the new year. *Trashman Goes Moonlighting* would see the waste disposal operative doing a range of other part-time jobs to make ends meet. Spectrum owners also missed out on this third *Trashman* experience, too.

The people at Melbourne House had been busy bunnies with a bagful of new titles ready to go. *Wham! The Music Box* was a utility to help write music; *Gyroscope* was a game similar in style to *Marble Madness*; *Fighting Warrior* was about warriors fighting; *Terrormolinos* was a graphic adventure; and *Big Daddy's Wrestling* eventually morphed into *Rock 'N Wrestle*. All five made it onto



» *Back To Skool* (Spectrum): Eric is back and trying to complete the second half of his school report rewriting mission.



» *Match Day* (Amstrad): *Amstrad Action* gave it 89%, *Amtix!* gave it 37%. *Amtix!* was right. Not a patch on the Spectrum original.

1985

NOVEMBER NEWS



» Reagan refuses to negotiate on the SDI issue and points out to Gorbachev that the Death Star in orbit is fully functional.

13 November saw the volcano, Nevado del Ruiz, erupt in Columbia. The eruption melted ice at the summit of the volcano causing lahars, landslides containing water and pyroclastic material. These lahars travel smoothly when flowing but once stopped, they set like concrete. The city of Armero was hit by one of these lahars, burying it under 16 feet of solid mud. Over 21,000 were killed in the city that had a population of just 28,700.

19 November saw the first meeting between US President, Ronald Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev. The summit in Switzerland was hoped to resolve the problem of increasing nuclear arsenals. An agreement was reached to cut nuclear weapons by 50 per cent, although one sticking point was Reagan's refusal to negotiate on the subject of America's Strategic Defence Initiative (SDI) – defensive lasers positioned in space to destroy incoming missiles.

On 24 November an Egypt Air Boeing 737 was hijacked and forced to land in Malta. Unfortunately, the hijackers began to execute passengers, with five shot dead. The Maltese Prime Minister authorised for the plane to be stormed by commandoes to bring an end to the crisis. Two of the three hijackers were killed, along with 59 of the 90 passengers.



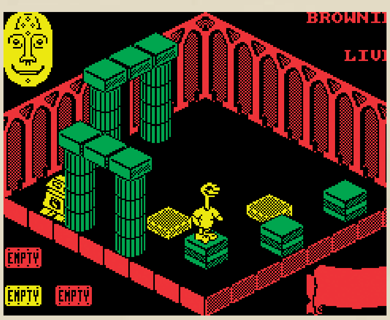
» The volcano Nevado del Ruiz erupts and the lahar virtually wipes an entire town off the map. Somewhere under that mud is Armero…



» *Robin Of The Wood* (Spectrum): Odin's take on Ultimate's *Sabre Wulf* created an atmospheric game that is better than the original.

Spectrum, C64 and the Amstrad with some of them being reasonably entertaining.

At first glance, Gargoyle Games newest creation, *Sweevo's World*, looked to be just another copycat isometric game. Featuring some tremendous 3D graphics, some top-drawer puzzling and a large dollop of surreal humour, *Sweevo* turned out to be a terrific game… and what's more the CPC edition did actually make an appearance. An extended Spectrum 128K version of the game was also announced for release in early 1986 with the name of the game being altered to *Sweevo's Whirled* to avoid confusion.



» *Sweevo's World* (Amstrad): Gargoyle's foray into arcade adventure territory was stunning.

With the hugely successful *Skool Daze* by Microsphere selling by the satchel load, it came as no surprise when the company revealed it had a sequel ready. *Back To Skool* would feature schoolboy Eric attempting to replace his report, which he had half-inched in the first game. As good as it was, though, *Back To Skool* only made it onto the Spectrum.

Amstrad gamers were spoilt for choice with the two recent additions to the CPC magazine family. *Amtix!* assessed and scored *Highway Encounter* (Vortex), *Dragontorc Of Avalon* (Hewson Consultants), *Starion* (Melbourne House), *Finders Keepers* (Mastertronic), *Sorcery Plus* (Amsoft/Virgin), and *Red Moon* (Level 9) with all becoming the first custodians of the new Amtix! Accolade award.

Their main competitor, *Amstrad Action*, gave Mastergame status to *Highway Encounter* (Vortex), with the lesser AA Rave thrust upon *Dragontorc* (Hewson), *Wizard's Lair* (Bubble Bus), *The Covenant* (PSS), *Southern Belle* (Hewson Consultants), *Bruce Lee* (US Gold), *The Devil's Crown* (Probe Software), *Match Day* (Ocean), *Raid* (US Gold) and *Starion* (Melbourne House).

Zzap! hung its Gold Medal top award around the necks of not one but two games this month: *Paradroid* (Hewson) and *Little Computer People* (Activision). There was a handful of Sizzlers, too, in the form of *Wizard's Lair* (Bubble Bus), *Starcross* (Commodore) and *Winter Games* (Epyx/US Gold).

For Spectrum gamers, *Crash* could only manage to Smash *Starquake* (Bubble Bus), *Marsport* (Gargoyle Games), *Fairlight* (The Edge) and *Elite* (Firebird).

THIS MONTH IN…

AMTIX!



In the first issue, the first review and the first ever Amtix Accolade went to Costa Panayi's superb isometric game *Highway Encounter*. With rival magazine *Amstrad Action* also new to the scene, it was gratifying to see *AA* give *Highway Encounter* its Mastergame top award. Consistency in reviews – good to see!



ZZAP!



Gold Medal-winning software *Little Computer People* from Activision, received a whopping 97% for being a "stunning advance in computer entertainment". Granted, it was certainly different, being essentially the illegitimate lovechild of a Tamagochi toy and a copy of *The Sims*… but 97% for a pet person?



SINCLAIR USER



SU interviewed Greg Follis and Royston Carter, the men behind Gargoyle Games and found, during questioning, that the game of *Dun Darach* had its own red light district in the centre of the city. Unfortunately censorship took hold and all that remains in the game is a locked door and a sign stating "Forbidden".



CHARTS

NOVEMBER 1985



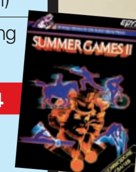
MUSIC

1. The Power Of Love (Jennifer Rush)
2. A Good Heart (Feargal Sharkey)
3. Take On Me (A-Ha)
4. Nikita (Elton John)
5. Don't Break My Heart (UB40)



SPECTRUM

1. The Way Of The Exploding Fist (Melbourne House)
2. Daley Thompson's Supertest (Ocean)
3. Nightshade (Ultimate)
4. Now Games (Virgin)
5. Frank Bruno's Boxing (Elite)



COMMODORE 64

1. Summer Games II (Epyx/US Gold)
2. Sky Fox (Ariolasoft)
3. Beach Head 2 (US Gold)
4. The Way Of The Exploding Fist (Melbourne House)
5. Now Games (Virgin)

AMSTRAD

1. The Way Of The Exploding Fist (Melbourne House)
2. Frank Bruno's Boxing (Elite)
3. Finders Keepers (Mastertronic)
4. Nonterraqueous (Mastertronic)
5. Chiller (Mastertronic)



BACK TO THE NINETIES

THE LATEST NEWS FROM JULY 1991



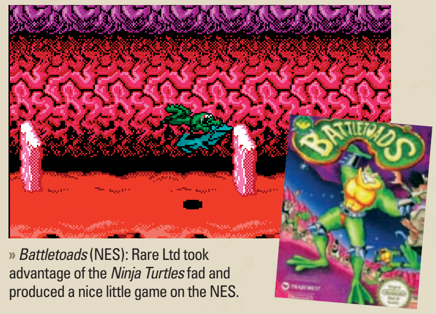
JULY 1991 – Neo Geo a go-go, Game Genie cheats Nintendo, CDTV arrives, Plan 9 from Gremlin, toadying from Rare and the first signs of Mario Kart for the SNES at CES. Richard Burton buckles up, gives it stick and makes a skid mark…



» The Neo Geo console; reassuringly expensive and not available in Rumbelows, Hydrovolt or John Menzies.



» The GX4000 could be picked up for just £19 towards the end of its life. Some would argue that even that was too expensive.



» *Battletoads* (NES): Rare Ltd took advantage of the *Ninja Turtles* fad and produced a nice little game on the NES.

After being traded and sold on the grey market for well over a year on import from Japan, the Neo Geo home system would reportedly finally receive its official UK launch at the Consumer Electronics Show in September. According to the distribution company, the Neo Geo console would be expected to retail for £299.

Although the Neo Geo's price appeared to be hefty, it had actually been reduced by £150 in time for the launch. However, the price of the games promised to cause nausea. With prices for the cartridges ranging from £79 to £149, the system was going to be well out of the range of most casual gamers. This was reflected in the marketing strategy employed for the system, with it being sold through upmarket stores such as Harrods and labelling the system more as an executive toy rather than a games console.

Focusing on a niche market (pinstriped suits with cash) for the console's main user base was seen by many as commercial suicide, leaving the superb machine dead in the water before it was even released in the UK.

While the Neo Geo tried to tempt royalty, film stars and oil barons, right at the other end of the spectrum were two of console gaming's least successful ventures. The Amstrad GX4000 and Commodore's C64GS systems had their prices slaughtered in an attempt to generate interest to shift remaining shop stock. Several retailers were selling the GX4000 for just £19, with the C64GS priced to clear at £29.

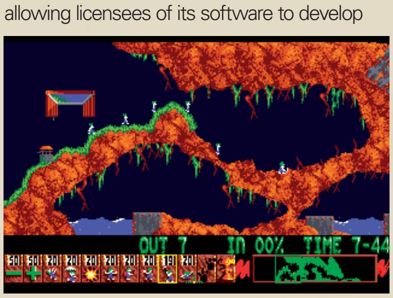


» Having been through the courts with Nintendo, the Darling brothers were now set to rake it in with their Game Genies.

Virgin Mastertronic, who distributed Sega's wares around the UK, had reportedly been bought out by Sega in a £40 million deal. With the Mega Drive and *Sonic The Hedgehog*, Sega presumably saw huge profits looming and by taking direct control of the distribution, the company could take a meatier slice of the profits. With Sega projecting profits for 1992 of £250 million, it's not surprising to see why the deal was struck.

Elsewhere, Nintendo was finally defeated after a protracted court case with Galoob and Codemasters, the distributer and developer of the Game Genie cheat device. Nintendo believed that the Genie infringed copyright of its games but the courts found in favour of Codemasters and the Darling's belated US launch of the Game Genie could commence.

Nintendo did muster some gaming cheer for software developers with the news that it would finally waiver exclusivity restrictions, allowing licensees of its software to develop conversions for Sega's machines as well as the NES and SNES.



» *Lemmings* (Commodore CDTV): As part of the launch pack for the CDTV system, *Lemmings* didn't showcase what it could do.

Commodore proudly showed off its latest piece of hardware, the CDTV entertainment system – a 1MB Amiga and CD/VCD player tucked away in a stylish matt black case. Priced at £499, you also got two CDTV titles: *Lemmings* (Psygnosis) and the obligatory title of *Hutchinson's Encyclopaedia*, cram-packed with information you'll never ever use.

Several games were announced for the first wave of CDTV releases but most turned out to be ports from the original Amiga versions. The system was undeniably powerful yet failed to ignite the interest of gamers or home entertainment enthusiasts alike.

US Gold revealed plans this month to release Spectrum and Amstrad games on the same cassette. It was seen as a direct response to the news from several big retailers that they had plans to stop the sale of full price games on those systems. The twin format was seen as a good idea to retain interest from the stores to continue stocking 8-bit software. Presumably CPC and Spectrum owners became friends overnight and sales of C90 blank cassettes rose sharply.



» *Impossamole* (PC Engine): Monty Mole makes his debut on the PC Engine. Run of the mill stuff but still moderately playable.

1991

JULY NEWS

9 July saw the collapse of a banking giant. The Bank of Credit and Commerce International (BCCI) crashed after allegations of fraudulent activity. The investment bank had been approved by the Bank of England and had cost councils millions of pounds that they had invested with the bank. The councils pointed the finger at the Bank of England for recommending BCCI.



» Jeffrey Dahmer; serial killer, cannibal and necrophiliac. It probably wouldn't have been wise to invite him around for a spot of lunch.



» The warning signs were there. Despite massive bonuses and suspected fraudulent activity, BCCI's head office was downsized.

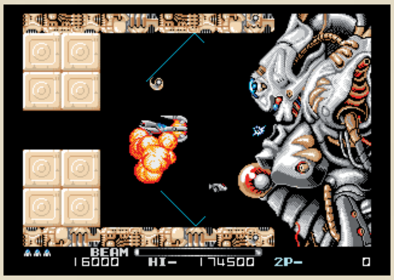
Ten years later BCCI's liquidators were given the right to sue the Bank of England for not regulating BCCI properly. The lawsuit began in January 1994, but was dropped a year later.

22 July saw the arrest of infamous American serial killer, Jeffrey Dahmer, who had murdered 17 men and boys. His trial began in January 1992 in which he pleaded not guilty, claiming insanity. He was found guilty, and sane, and sentenced to multiple life sentences totalling 957 years in prison. He served less than three years before he was bludgeoned to death by a fellow inmate, Christopher Scarver, with a bar from a weight training machine.





» *Super Mario Kart* (SNES): Prepare the tissues, *Super Mario Kart* is announced. T-Minus 18 months and counting…



» *R-Type II* (Amiga): More of the same but still highly playable and with some great graphics. A fine arcade conversion.

Plan 9 From Outer Space – a science-fiction masterpiece or a giant pile of cinematic pap? Well, with the announcement that Gremlin Graphics was starting development on a point-and-click adventure for the Amiga, Atari ST and PC, you would be able to decide for yourself whether it translated well from silver screen to colour monitor. The game eventually appeared around mid-1992 and turned out to be surprisingly playable.

Gremlin also had several other projects lined up for release over the coming months including the Monty Mole game, *Impossamole*, for the PC Engine, *Supercars* on the NES and, most excitingly of all, the long-awaited sequel to the superb *Lotus Esprit Turbo Challenge* for Amiga and ST owners.

Rare Ltd was attempting to cash-in on the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* phenomena with the forthcoming release of *Battletoads* for the NES. It proved to be a popular game and spawned several conversions ranging in quality, from great on the NES to downright bloody awful on the Amiga. In keeping with the trend, a proposed *Sumo Tadpoles From Venus* game was pitched but not accepted.

Among the umpteen reports detailing the latest Consumer Electronics Show in Chicago, there was one game that seemed to stand out over the abundance of mediocrity and multitude of rushed movie-licensed titles. Nintendo showed off for the first time its split screen racing game featuring Mario and a host of his friends and enemies. The mighty *Super Mario Kart* was coming to the SNES… although it would be 18 long months before UK gamers got to play it.

In *Mean Machines*, the Mega Game awards were dished out to *Sonic The Hedgehog* (Sega, Mega Drive), *Captain Skyhawk* (Rare, NES), *GG Shinobi* (Sega, Game Gear) and *Shadow Warrior* (Tecmo, NES).

Meanwhile, the *Computer & Video Games* reviewers took a shine to *Sim City* (Imagineer, Super Famicom), *Hero Quest* (Gremlin, Amiga), *Hunter* (Activision, Amiga), *Solstice: The Quest For The Staff Of Demnos* (Trade West, NES), *Chuck Yeager's Air Combat* (Electronic Arts, PC), *GG Shinobi* (Sega, Game Gear), *Star Control* (Ballistic, Mega Drive) and *The Simpsons* (Arcade), with all getting the illustrious C&VG Hit stamp of approval.

The multi-format *Zero* magazine deemed *R-Type II* (Activision, Amiga), *Logical* (Rainbow Arts, Atari ST), *Jet Fighter II* (US Gold, PC) and *Wreckers* (Audiogenic, Amiga) worthy of Zero Hero status with the console equivalent, the Console Classic, given out to *Jackie Chan* (Hudsonsoft, PC Engine) and *Gremlins 2* (SunSoft, NES and Game Boy).

THIS MONTH IN…



MEAN MACHINES

With the Nintendo Vs Galoob/Codemasters court case finally settled, the console cheat device, the Game Genie, received a full review in anticipation of the forthcoming release of the NES and Mega Drive versions, priced at a £39.99 and £44.99 respectively. Game Boy, Game Gear and SNES versions were also being developed.





YOUR SINCLAIR

The games that weren't released (but were apparently finished) saga continued with Ocean's various versions of *Toki*. The Spectrum version was virtually complete, as an in-depth preview warranted a *Toki* front cover for the July issue of *Your Sinclair*.





ZERO

Zero contained two adverts so unspeakably bad that they looked to have been drawn by a crayon-wielding four-year-old dosed up on lashings of full fat Fanta. The Monster Sound Cartridge advert was ropey at best but *Germ Crazy* took crap adverts to a whole new level.



CHARTS

JULY 1991



AMIGA

1. Wonderland (Virgin)
2. PGA Golf Tour (Electronic Arts)
3. Lemmings (Psygnosis)
4. Gods (Renegade/Bitmaps)
5. Sim City/Populous (Infogrames)



ATARI ST

1. Lemmings (Psygnosis)
2. Final Whistle (Anco)
3. Megatraveller 1 (Empire)
4. F-19 (MicroProse)
5. BAT (Ubisoft)

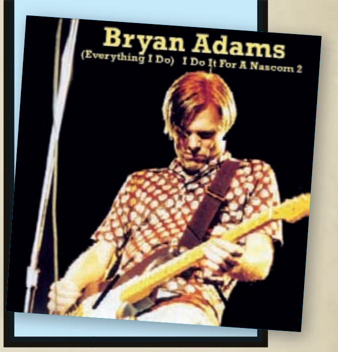


PC

1. Space Quest IV (Sierra)
2. Links (Access/US Gold)
3. Sim Earth (Ocean)
4. Wing Commander (Origin/Mindscape)
5. Kings Quest V (Sierra)

MUSIC

1. (Everything I Do) I Do It For You (Bryan Adams)
2. Any Dream Will Do (Jason Donovan)
3. Now That We've Found Love (Heavy D & The Boyz)
4. You Could Be Mine (Guns 'N' Roses)
5. Things That Make You Go Hmmm (C&C Music Factory)



08

THE OOZE

SEGA GETS SNOTTY



- » **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- » **RELEASED:** 1995
- » **GENRE:** ACTION ADVENTURE
- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** SEGA MEGA DRIVE
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £10



HISTORY

Most game characters start their adventures at rock bottom, dropped in at the start of Level 1 with nary a mushroom or gold ring to their name. Spare a thought, then, for Dr Craine, the protagonist of *The Ooze,* who begins by having his body graphically liquidised and flushed down the toilet before he even hears any level music.

The unfortunate Dr Craine had been working on a new undetectable chemical weapon. He tries to blow the whistle, but is caught and injected with green ooze that breaks his body down in moments, and then he's dumped down the drain. With just his skull and a fist remaining solid, he somehow manages to survive, and finds that he can still control his snotty new body. Like all good tragic scientist types, he then embarks on a mission to stop the bad guys and reconstruct his human form.

Presumably he does, but I never actually completed the game. As well as being unmercifully difficult, *The Ooze* is a heck of a game to get your head around. You control Craine's green puddle, which oozes very convincingly around corners and through narrow spaces just like real liquid would. The effect is impressive. Your mass also doubles up as your health bar, but the bigger you get, the tougher it is to keep track of yourself. Lasers will slice you, worms will eat you, drains will drain you and every time you spit a ball of gloop at an enemy you reduce in size a little.

The levels boil down to switch-based mazes that have been coincidently designed to perfectly accommodate an invading pool of slime. They can get repetitive, though, and the numerous mandatory-damage sections can make the game tough to stick with. Many enemies seem unfairly tough, and each of the levels ends with a rather unimaginative boss. *The Ooze* is a considerable technical achievement, but while the elements that the designers wanted to push are indeed well done, sadly it just feels like the rest of the game was phoned in.

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RETROBATE PROFILE

» NAME: JOHN DELANEY
» JOINED: 20 JUL 2008
» LOCATION: IRELAND
» OCCUPATION: COMPLETE MYSTERY
» FAV GAMES SYSTEM: MEGA DRIVE



WHEN SUPER MARIO KART APPEARED IN 1992 IT PROVED THAT THE MOUSTACHIOED PLUMBER WAS JUST AS COMFORTABLE ON ASPHALT AS HE WAS FACING KOOPA TROOPERS. **DARRAN JONES** REVS UP HIS ENGINE AND TAKES TO THE TRACK



» (DS) Tapping the bottom screen switches between either a close-up of the section of track you were on, or the strip in its entirety.

Mario is easily one of the most versatile videogame characters of all time. Despite being a plumber by trade we've never actually seen him lift a wrench in his 28 years of appearing in games. We have, however, seen him rescuing princesses, defeating giant apes, beating seven bells out of other famous Nintendo mascots, and taking part in seemingly every sporting event known to man – everything from golf to football. Perhaps our favourite Mario pastime though is when the plucky plumber decided to put rescuing Princess Peach on hold and instead participated in a bout of racing that not only kick-started a brand new genre and became one of the SNES's most popular games, but also grew into a massive worldwide franchise that's still immensely popular today.

That game, of course, was *Super Mario Kart*, a dazzling slice of old-school gameplay that transported Mario and some of his closest friends – and enemies – to a selection of brilliantly designed Mode 7 racetracks and proved that there was more to the portly hero than simply lobbing fireballs and bashing blocks.

Overseen by the legendary Shigeru Miyamoto, *Super Mario Kart* transported you into Mario's world, surrounded you with instantly recognisable places and characters from the Mushroom Kingdom and proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that Miyamoto was a living, walking videogame genius. After all, here was a game that was vastly different to anything else that the plumber had originally appeared in (although he'd already made a successful outing on the golf course) and yet it still felt just like a *Mario* game. Levels like Mario Circuit with its green pipes, the Boos circling the Ghost Valley tracks, the Cheep Cheeps that infested Koopa Beach, the way races ended and finished with Lakitu, who was also on hand to rescue racers who had fallen off the track; *Super Mario Kart* just felt instantly familiar and gave the impression that Mario and the rest of his rivals had been born to kart from their very inception.

If *Super Mario Kart*'s familiarity was critical to its success (it eventually sold over 8 million units to become the third bestselling game on the SNES after *Super Mario World* and *Donkey Kong Country*) then the perfectly balanced gameplay proved to be just as important. A wonderfully structured difficulty mode, starting off with simple 50cc karts, eased you into Mario's new pastime, while three progressively tougher cups – Mushroom, Flower and Cup, all consisting of five tracks each – slowly marked your transition from plumber on a mission to four-wheeled wonder. Once you've successfully completed the first 15 courses on the 50cc difficulty you can then progress to the faster, nippier 100cc and 150cc difficulty



> “Super Mario Kart is a dazzling slice of old-school gaming”





settings and attempt the five tricky tracks that make up the final Special Cup (it's worth noting that the cups in later games consisted of just four tracks each).

It's a relatively simplistic formula to be sure, but the expertly crafted difficulty of each cc class is beautifully structured and offers a distinct new challenge that few other racers of the time were able to match. It should come as no surprise then to learn that the cc system has appeared in every *Mario Kart* game since (with the sole exception of *Mario Kart Arcade GP*).

Arguably one of the most impressive aspects of *Super Mario Kart*, though, was its actual track design, which for many (us included) has never been as good in later games as it was in the original. Short and tightly designed, they constantly tested the player's mettle, featured some excellent shortcuts and boasted endless replayability. Little wonder then that we've spent more time on *Super Mario Kart*'s Time Trial mode than any other since (although *Mario Kart DS* comes pretty close). We've lost count of the many hours lost to Mario Circuit 1, Koopa Beach 1 and we can only guess how many appointments we were late for because we were too busy perfecting our laps on Rainbow Road, Bowser Castle 3 and Ghost Valley 1. While later editions of *Mario Kart* featured ghosts that you could race against, the simplicity and sheer cleverness of *Super Mario Kart*'s track designs still hold an inescapable allure for us.

If *Super Mario Kart*'s Time Trials were great fun, the main Grand Prix mode proved to be no less enjoyable, and while it only supported two players (something many clones were quick to improve on) it nevertheless proved to be excellent. When racing on your own the screen was split in two with the lower half either showing whoever was behind you or letting you see the entire course and your competitors' current positions. While racing was the order of the day, a variety of items, ranging from mushroom speed boosts to red homing Koopa shells were also on offer, which really allowed you to get the drop on your opponents. Far better balanced than in later editions of the game, certain items could give you a huge lead, but were never so broken that they made it impossible for you to ever get back in first place if you were languishing at the back of the pack.

Last, but by no means least was *Super Mario Kart*'s Battle mode, which pitted you against a second player and had you trying to burst their three balloons before they did the same to you. Again, it's an incredibly simple concept but the small arenas kept the action wonderfully tense and proved to be almost as fun as the Time Trial mode.

Super Mario Kart not only proved that Mario was one of gaming's most versatile characters, but set a precedent on the machine that no other racer (by Nintendo or otherwise) on the SNES was able to match. It remains many gamer's favourite game in the franchise – and rightly so – but Miyamoto and the rest of the *Mario* team were only just starting to get warmed up…

When *Mario Kart 64* arrived on the scene in December 1996 (for the Japanese at least), expectation was



THE COMPLETE HISTORY OF MARIO KART



predictably, some might say impossibly, high. While some will no doubt argue that the original Super Nintendo effort remains the gleaming jewel in a sparsely fitting crown – the franchise includes just eight games – there can be no denying that *Mario Kart 64* set the groundwork for the *Mario Kart* we know today and a lot of elements from the N64 game have become recurring themes in the series. The cc difficulty modes were still in place, the number of laps you needed to complete permanently dropped from five to three (although Baby Park on *Double Dash!!* upped the ante to seven laps), the courses themselves tended to be a lot bigger, while coins no longer made an appearance. Four-player racing was now supported, ghost riders could be raced against in the Time Attack mode – providing you had a memory card – while it was also possible to unlock mirror tracks. Then there was the addition of the mini-boost (created by rapidly pushing left and right after a hop), which, when used correctly could be an amazing way of accelerating out of some of the tracks' many sharp corners and became a deadly tool in the hands of skilled players. The Special Cup returned, but this time there was also a Mirror mode, for all tracks, that was waiting to be unlocked.

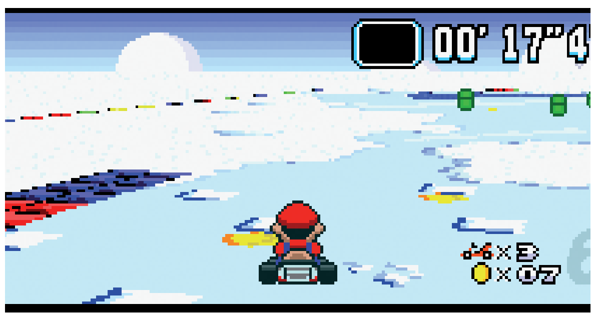
Originally known as *Super Mario Kart R*, another new addition to the series that has since become a *Mario Kart* standard was that the available racers were split into distinct categories – it's worth noting that the original *Super Mario Kart* manual uses Standard Performance (Mario and Luigi), Fast Acceleration (Peach and Yoshi), High Top Speed (Bowser and DK Jr) and Good Control (Koopa Troopa and Toad) – Lightweights, which included Toad, Princess Peach and Yoshi, Middleweights appeared in the form of Mario and Luigi, while Bowser, Donkey Kong and Wario – making his first appearances in the franchise – represented the Heavyweight division. Lightweights boast excellent acceleration and a solid top speed, but aren't so strong on corners, Middleweights are great for beginners due to their overall dependency in all areas, while the heavyweights lack good acceleration but grip to the track like flies on honey. Their huge size also makes them great for barging through smaller players and they tend to be the most popular choices when playing Battle mode.

The biggest difference to the franchise though was the transition from 2D to 3D, which greatly affected how the game played. While the Mode 7 courses of *Super Mario Kart* were brilliant, but in their design and execution, the move to the third dimension provided changes to the series that just hadn't been possible before. Huge ramps, rolling hills, deadly pits, curved corners that slowly graduated in height. It not only made a huge difference to how the series looked (although the racers and items remained as 2D pre-rendered sprites), but also to *Mario Kart 64*'s overall racing.

While *Mario Kart 64* set many standards for the series that have now become common practice, it remains (along with *Mario Kart: Double Dash!!*) one of the most controversial games in the franchise, not least because it was the first game in the series to dispense with the incredibly popular feather power-up (although screenshots from *Super Mario Kart R* suggest it was dumped at the last minute) and ushered in the reign of the Blue Shell.

Seen by many as nothing more than an unfair cheating device, the Blue Shell (which is spiked in both *Mario Kart 64* and *Super Circuit*) was only picked up if you were placed further back and will hurtle down the centre of the track taking out anyone that got in its way, until it reached whoever was in first place (this was changed to a flying blue shell in later editions that could unerringly fly into first place to leave an explosion that would take out nearby players).

Then there was the way that a computer player was barely troubled by fired weapons and could literally nip off again at full speed upon getting hit (a player on the other hand would come to a complete stop and have to slowly build up their speed again). Ultimately, *Mario Kart 64* divided the fans of the original game simply because it had now become obvious to many that the series was now being pushed as a party game to enjoy with your mates instead of the pure racing that had been so apparent in the first game. Of course, we ourselves feel this is utter tosh. The ability to race against your own ghosts and the mastering of the new turbo boost



» (SNES) Hitting ice blocks would slow you down, while the icy track was very slippery to negotiate.







» (N64) Bowser's Castle is a tough track on the N64 and features sharp turns and plenty of deadly Thwomps to avoid.



» (GameCube) As well as featuring dual karts, *Double Dash!!* was also the first game in the series to include replays.

WEAPON OF CHOICE

There are a staggering amount of different items to use in the Mario Kart series – here are just a few of them…



Banana
One of the most common weapons in the game, banana skins cause opponents to spin out of control and temporarily slow them down. They can be thrown ahead of the kart or dropped behind it. Braking upon hitting a banana skin (or pressing the trick button in *Mario Kart Wii*) can prevent a skid out.



Blooper
Bloopers first appeared in *Mario Kart DS* and blind all opponents behind the player by squirting a large amount of ink over their screens, so making it very difficult to see what's going on.



Blue Spiky Shell
Limited to *Mario Kart 64* and *Super Circuit*, this item appears whenever a player is in sixth to eighth place. If launched it follows the centre of the track until it hits whoever's in the lead.



Bob-omb
As well as being avoidable hazards on certain tracks, Bob-ombs can also be picked up and thrown at other racers. Upon landing they eventually explode taking anyone out that's near them.



Bullet Bill
While this bonus makes the player virtually indestructible for a few precious seconds, it's important that it's used in the right circumstances. After all, there's nothing worse than immediately careening off the sides of the smaller tracks when it runs out…



Golden Mushroom
Toad and Toadette's *Double Dash!!* special is a handy power-up that offers a continuous burst of speed. It's a great way of catching up with other players, but can lead to disaster if handled incorrectly.



Green Shell
When fired directly ahead of the player it will travel in a straight line until it ricochets off the side of the track (or an object). After five such ricochets the shell disappears. Also comes in sets of three.



Item Box
These are essential to the *Mario Kart* series as they hold the other power-ups. Flat question marks in *Super Mario Kart*, they took on a third dimension for subsequent *Mario Kart* games.



Mushroom
Available in either singles or sets of three, these very handy power-ups give you a quick boost of speed. Used effectively they can make or break where you end up finishing in a race.



POW Block
Exclusive to *Mario Kart Wii*, this item takes out anyone that's in front of it when it goes off, but doesn't damage those behind it. Needless to say, there's no point using this if you're in first place.



Red Shells
First appearing in *Super Mario Kart*, Red Shells will immediately home in on whoever is ahead of the player in possession of the shell. If picked up in a set of three they can be used as a handy barrier (just like green shells).



Starman
An excellent power-up that makes you temporarily invincible, as well as giving you a temporary speed boost. You'll only get it if you're placed sixth or lower, however.

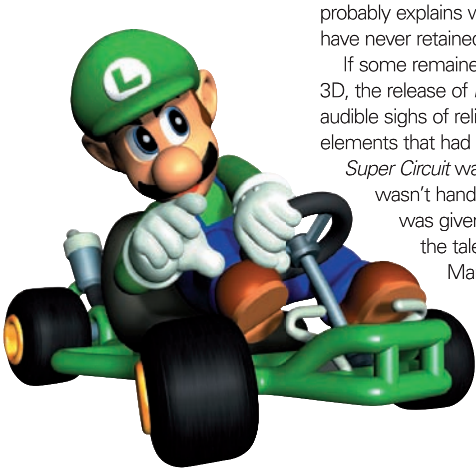


Thunderbolt
An excellent little item that shrinks (and slows down) all the other racers on the track, allowing you a nice advantage. Its effectiveness changes depending on the game you're playing, but this is still well worth picking up.

"Mario Kart 64 really divided fans of the original game"

– powersliding has been in the series since *Super Mario Kart*, but *Mario Kart 64* was the first time using it gave you a benefit – meant that single-player racing was just as exciting as it had ever been. Nevertheless the dye had been cast for the rest of the series, which probably explains why certain people feel that more recent outings have never retained the pureness of the 16-bit original.

If some remained disappointed by the franchise's transition to 3D, the release of *Mario Kart Super Circuit* in 2001 was greeted by audible sighs of relief from those who had been upset with the unfair elements that had crept into *Mario Kart 64*.



Super Circuit was also the first game in the *Mario Kart* series that wasn't handled exclusively by Nintendo, as Intelligent Systems was given the keys to the precious licence. Needless to say, the talented Japanese developer did not let Nintendo, Mario or fans of the series down.

Although *Super Mario Kart*'s excellent feather remained annoyingly absent from the game and the blue, spiked shell remained frustratingly present, *Super Circuit* represented a refreshing return to form for the series that once again saw the focus shift from frenzied, party play to the time trials and pure racing of *Super Mario Kart*.

Of course, part of this change could have possibly been down to the change of developer or even to the fact that *Super Circuit*'s admittedly excellent multiplayer mode just wasn't that readily available to most players. Four Game Boy Advances, four copies of the game and relevant leads were all needed to get the full *Super Circuit* experience, so the lack of resources meant that many would instead focus on *Super Circuit*'s single-player modes.

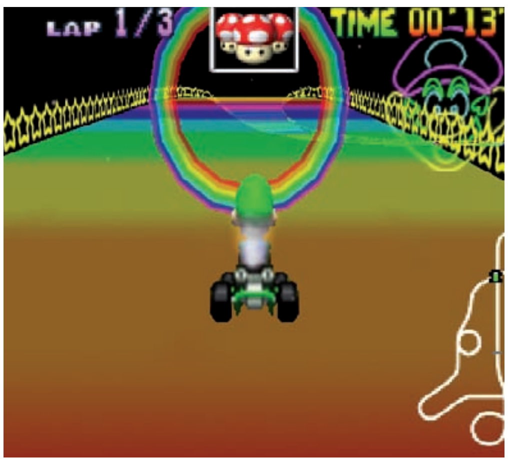
Luckily, the single-player elements had been suitably beefed up and the end result was a title that was as deeply layered as any onion and would take months of bus rides to fully complete. Although the eight racers from *Mario Kart 64* were all present and correct there were still plenty of new elements to consider as you hurtled round brilliant tracks like Shy Guy Beach and Cheep Cheep Island.

The most obvious was the addition of a fifth cup (the Lightning Cup) and the ability to receive a powerslide boost by simply holding down the hop button – no doubt because waggling away on the Game Boy Advance's tiny D-pad would have been a nightmare. Coins also returned for a second hoorah but now they held a more important role than simply boosting your top speed, as they were also used to unlock the greatest addition to the *Mario Kart* series – namely the return of classic tracks.

Once you'd completed a set of cups and then raced through them again while collecting 100 coins, you came to what was arguably *Super Circuit*'s greatest asset: the ability to play through all 20 tracks from *Super Mario Kart*. Recognising not only the fans who had been



» (GBA) Get hit by an item or enemy and you'll either spin out and come to an annoying stop that can take an age to recover from.

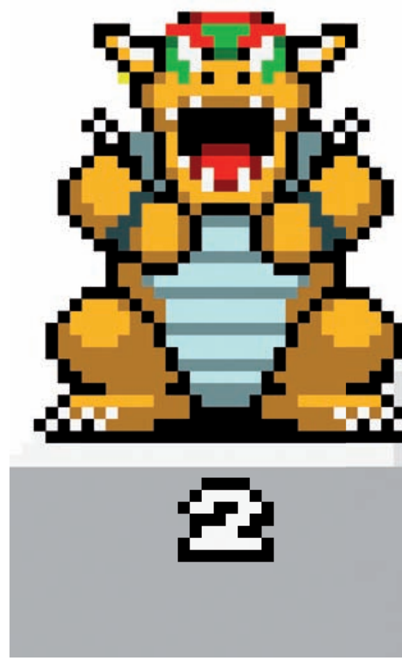


» (N64) Rainbow Road in all its gaudy glory. It's the last track in each version of the game and is also one of the toughest.

» (GC) Certain fans of *Mario Kart* will argue that the multicart racing in *Double Dash!!* is the best in the series. We wouldn't go that far, but it is good fun (if a little unfair).



"Super Circuit's greatest asset was the 20 tracks it took from Super Mario Kart"



upset with the direction of *Mario Kart 64*, but that the original game itself was a true classic, Intelligent Systems and Nintendo's decision to include those 20 classic raceways is something we're still eternally grateful for. Yes, there were a few subtle alterations – the absence of the feather, for example, meant that you'd never be able to obtain the same scores you had tirelessly achieved on the original SNES game – but it was a fantastic inclusion that quickly became a series standard. Arguably one of the greatest additions to any new *Mario Kart* game these days is seeing just how classic tracks will translate over to the new games. It's a great inclusion and one that we wish other games would adopt. It should be noted, however, that no matter how many times the original tracks have returned, they've never been quite as good as they were on the SNES (another indication of the game's utter brilliance).

Big Nintendo franchises follow their latest machines as surely as night follows day, so there was little surprise from the gaming community when Nintendo revealed that an all-new *Mario Kart* experience would be appearing on its GameCube.

Mario Kart: Double Dash!! proved to be the boldest outing for the franchise yet, and while it appears to now share the same love/hate affair that *Mario Kart 64* still invokes, it nevertheless remains a great addition to the popular franchise. For the first time ever, it was now possible to play in huge – for *Mario Kart* at least – eight-player versus games (or 16 players with two players per kart in a LAN setup if you wanted to get really stupid), which were more intense and hectic than ever before. It also proved once and for all that skill was not held in high regard by Nintendo and that fun was the ultimate aim of the game. Race position could constantly switch and change at the press of a button, the infamous blue shell was now more devastating/annoying than ever, while the emphasis on wider tracks meant that they weren't as challenging (and therefore less interesting to race on time trials) as those from *Super Circuit* and *Super Mario Kart*.

The biggest change to the series was that each kart could now support a total of two racers – one to drive, the other to use items – the original roster of eight characters had swollen to a more respectable 14, while unlockable characters, a first for the series, were also available. It was also possible to choose a different kart at the beginning of each race. Split into the now-familiar weight classes of Light, Medium and Heavy, eight carts were initially available, with another 13 included as unlockable extras.

As with previous games in the series, *Double Dash!!* included plenty of new additions to the core *Mario Kart* gameplay, although for many these new tweaks weren't necessarily for the better. One of the biggest and most fundamental changes was that it was no longer

SEND IN THE CLONES Just like Mario Kart, only not…

Street Racer
Year Released: 1995 **Featured System:** Mega Drive

This effort from Ubisoft and Vivid Image was a flop on its original release, which is a pity as it's good fun. The bland characters were very forgettable, but the included tracks were pretty good fun and there were some crazy weapons, too. Best of all was the multiplayer mode which allowed eight players to race at one time.



Crazy Racing Kart Rider
Year Released: 2004 **Featured System:** Windows XP

Kart Rider is a huge, online Korean multiplayer kart racer that earns revenue by selling virtual items online. There's a whole host of gameplay modes on offer, including an excellent scenario mode and a fun take on capture the flag. Sadly the Western beta has been taken down with no mention to when it might come back.



Crash Team Racing
Year Released: 1999 **Featured System:** PlayStation

The last *Crash* game original developer Naughty Dog worked on before joining Sony, *Crash Team Racing* is a solid kart racer with a fun multiplayer, a decent single-player mode and plenty of wacky characters. Track design is solid and varied, meaning PlayStation owners were able to offer a two-fingered salute to N64 fans.



Diddy Kong Racing
Year Released: 1997 **Featured System:** N64

For many, *Diddy Kong Racing* is their favourite racing game on the N64. Published by Rare instead of Nintendo, *Diddy Kong Racing* has excellent visuals and a huge sprawling adventure mode that trounces *Mario Kart 64*'s single-player outing. One of best karting games around without Mario, there's even a DS update available.



Konami Krazy Racers
Year Released: 2001 **Featured System:** GBA

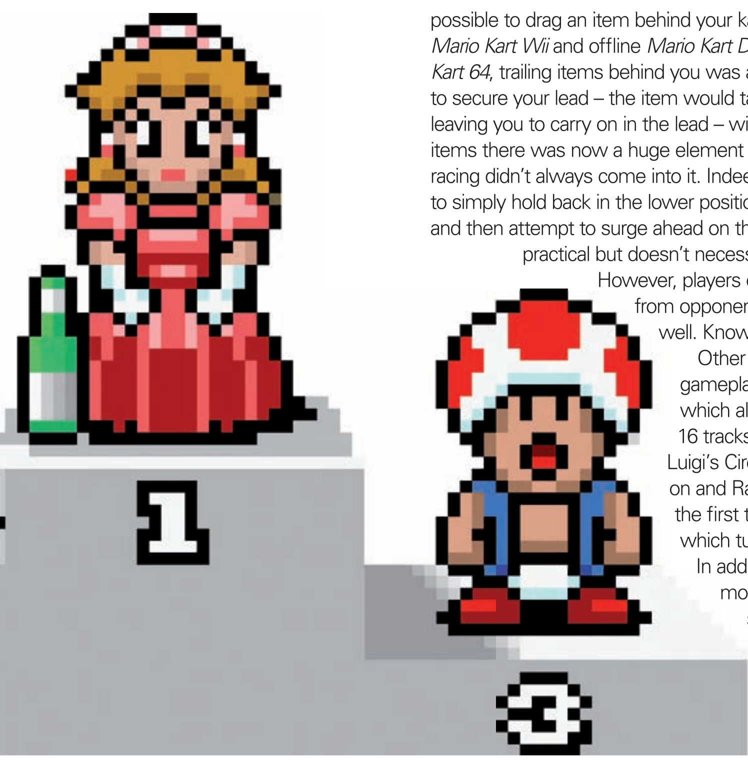
Konami Krazy Racers proved to be a perfectly adequate *Mario Kart* clone until *Super Circuit* appeared on the machine. Featuring 12 Konami characters, it boasts some fun tracks based on classic Konami games, decent power-ups, several enjoyable multiplayer modes and bright and cheerful visuals.



Sonic Drift
Year Released: 1994 **Featured System:** Game Gear

Sega obviously felt that anything Nintendo could do, it could do better. *Sonic Drift* is perfect proof that that doesn't apply to ripping off *Super Mario Kart*. Despite featuring Sonic and Tails, the pap controls, headache-inducing visuals and its slow pace meant it was worth leaving on the shelf. The sequel wasn't much better either.





possible to drag an item behind your kart (although this reappeared in *Mario Kart Wii* and offline *Mario Kart DS*). Since its inclusion in *Mario Kart 64*, trailing items behind you was an excellent strategy for helping to secure your lead – the item would take the brunt of any attack, leaving you to carry on in the lead – with scarce protection from other items there was now a huge element of luck, simply because good racing didn't always come into it. Indeed it's not unheard of for players to simply hold back in the lower positions to avoid the worst attacks and then attempt to surge ahead on the final lap, which is certainly practical but doesn't necessarily make for fun gameplay. However, players could dislodge and steal items from opponents through careful driving as well. Known as barging them in the side.

Other new additions to the core gameplay included a new All-Cup Tour, which allowed you to race through all 16 tracks in a random order (although Luigi's Circuit is always the first you race on and Rainbow Road the last), and – for the first time ever – new Battle modes, which turned out to be pretty good fun. In addition to the standard Balloon mode that's become a *Mario Kart* standard, there's Bob-omb Blast, which has you hurling bombs at each other and (our favourite) Shine Thief, which has you all tearing after a Shine and trying to keep hold of it for as long as possible. Needless to say, the small enclosed tracks that are available ensure that the gameplay constantly remains fast, furious and, above all, fun.

Considering the anarchic, fast-paced gameplay that the *Mario Kart* series boasts, it's somewhat surprising that it took 13 years for an arcade version to get released. Created in collaboration with Namco and utilising the Triforce Arcade Board – which itself came about due to a union between Nintendo, Sega and Namco – it's an excellent addition to the home series that consisted of two huge twin cabinets that could be linked together for some serious four-player action.

Roughly based upon *Mario Kart: Double Dash!!* (although the dual-player karts no longer make an appearance), the most notable aspect of *Mario Kart*'s first arcade outing was that it heralded the arrival of three exclusive Namco characters, Pac-Man, Mrs Pac-Man and Blinky – a fourth Mametchi from the Tamagotchi franchise, appears in the sequel – who, like the rest of the *Mario Kart* crew have their own strengths and weaknesses. Pac-Man turned out to be a particular favourite of ours. Other touches to the classic franchise included the ability to take a photo of your own face using the NamCam, which imported you into the game – therefore predating *Mario Kart Wii*'s Mii option by a good three years – a host of new weapons, ranging from custard pies to tacks and needle bombs, the return of collecting coins and using them to slowly increase your overall top speed and the use of a magnetic card, which could only be used on certain machines.

Utilising the same approach that had worked so well for a variety of arcade beat-'em-ups, like *Tekken 6* and *Virtua Fighter 5*, the magnetic card could be used to save your progress and to store up collected items, as well as saving all your best times. It also kept track of the number of coins you'd collected – which could be spent on new

THE COMPLETE HISTORY OF MARIOKART

items – any cups and classes you'd completed, your overall rank and a password allowing you to get on to an online-ranking leaderboard.

Interestingly, the standard 50, 100 and 150cc difficulty modes weren't actually included in *Arcade GP* (although they did appear in the 2007 sequel). Instead, six stages were available – Mario, Donkey Kong, Wario, Pac-Man, Bowser and Rainbow (the latter only being available once the first five had been fully completed) – all consisting of four tracks each. Another nice touch with *Arcade GP* was that completing all the tracks (no small feat in itself) allowed you to unlock a brand new challenge mode that consisted of a variety of wild and wacky tasks to complete, which was later carried over to *Mario Kart DS*. There were also traditional Time Trial modes and the four-player versus mode to compete in as well.

Sadly, for all its little tweaks and touches, *Mario Kart Arcade GP* and its sequel are easily the weakest games in the franchise and simply employ all the little gippy elements from the series. It's insanely expensive if you want to play it properly, the vast majority of the available tracks aren't a patch on the home versions that are available, while the rubber-band effect that's in place – the lead character becomes slower and the last character speeds up in order to keep races close – isn't as well implemented as it is in other racers. It's certainly worth experiencing, if only so you can play as Pac-Man and use his Namco-game-inspired power-ups, but the two games are nothing more than curiosity pieces and don't really do this fun franchise justice.



If *Mario Kart Arcade GP* and its sequel proved to be rather lacklustre, at least Nintendo managed to make amends with the excellent *Mario Kart DS*, which took the brilliance of *Mario Kart Super Circuit* and combined it with the very best elements of the home versions. It was also the first version of *Mario Kart* (and only the second Nintendo DS game) to include an official online mode, which not only proved to be surprisingly stable, but also became plagued with the infamous 'snaking' (also known as 'straight-stretch mini turboing', where the player constantly uses the turbo to tear around the track, even on straight sections) that ruined the excellent *F-Zero GX* for so many players. (While it wasn't online, there were online time trial contests using game-generated codes you inputted into the official website.)

Even snaking couldn't ruin what is arguably one of the best additions to the franchise, however, and while many of the older retro tracks that had been included – especially from *Super Mario Kart* – weren't quite as effective as they were on their original versions (something all later versions of *Mario Kart* suffer from to some degree), this was another jam-packed addition to the series that added plenty for the player to sink their teeth into.

Two Grand Prix modes (one consisting entirely of retro tracks) were available (with the now standard 150cc Mirror mode as an unlockable) and it was possible to play Battle mode on your own, with both Balloon Battle and Shine Runners (where you have to catch as many Shine sprites as possible). Perhaps one of our favourite improvements was to the Time Trial mode, which not only allowed you to store ghosts on all 32 available tracks, but also let you import friend's ghosts (via Wi-Fi) to your own cartridge to compete against. If that wasn't enough, there was also a massive new Missions mode, which greatly expanded upon the challenges first introduced in *Mario Kart Arcade GP*. The six stages each consisted of eight

TRACK ATTACK

There's a huge amount of classic tracks in the Mario Kart series, here are some of our favourites…

Ghost Valley 1

First Featured in: Super Mario Kart

One of the best tracks in the entire *Mario Kart* series, simply because it allows you to really have some fun when using the feather. There's a tiny little piece of track, which, although tricky to navigate, can put you a massive leap ahead of the competition if you time your jump correctly.



Wario Stadium

First Featured in: Mario Kart 64

Looking like something out of *Excitebike 64*, this is a superb track (if a little lengthy) because it features one of the meanest tricks in the series. When your opponents are on the giant ramp use the thunderbolt to shrink them, they won't have enough speed to clear the jump and they'll have to go around again.



Toad's Turnpike

First Featured in: Mario Kart 64

Another track that features a simple design – in this case a figure eight shape – Toad's Turnpike is still exceptionally fun to actually race upon. The difficulty here comes from the sheer amount of traffic on the road. Needless to say things get even harder when the difficulty level increases…



Sky Garden

First Featured in: Super Circuit

Sky Garden is an excellent little track set high above the ground, which uses clouds both to slow down players and also as handy barriers. Carefully used mushrooms can be abused to rocket you across some of the track's ramps, while the course itself reappeared in *Mario Kart DS*.



Yoshi Falls

First Featured in: Mario Kart DS

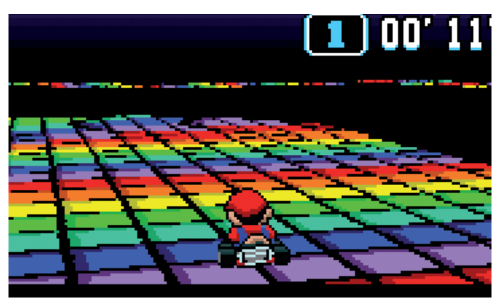
Boasting three waterfalls (the second of which is far too long to safely traverse), Yoshi Falls is yet another simple track that really comes into its own during multiplayer races. The best part about this course is the ability to send your opponents flying due to the lack of barriers in place. Great fun.



Rainbow Road

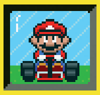
First Featured in: Super Mario Kart

With its devilish turns and eye-meltingly hypnotic colours, the final track of the Special Cup stage is loved and loathed in equal measure. While variations of Rainbow Road have featured in virtually every *Mario Kart* game since, it is the version in *Super Mario Kart* that remains our favourite.



THE ORIGINAL RACERS

32 individual characters have now appeared in Nintendo's popular karting series, but what about the original eight racers?



Mario

Karts Owned: 17 • **Home Tracks:** Mario Circuit, Mario Raceway • **Strengths:** Standard Performance

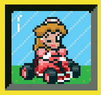
The star of *Mario Kart* is also the best all-rounder – although not necessarily the choice of more experienced players. His original kart was well balanced in terms of speed, handling, weight and acceleration – the perfect choice for beginners.



Luigi

Karts Owned: 16 • **Home Tracks:** Luigi's Raceway • **Strengths:** Standard Performance

Mario's brother is another excellent choice for players that are just starting out. Unlike his brother he actually has a slightly better top speed and better handling. The downside though is that his drifting is nowhere near as good as Mario's.



Peach

Karts Owned: 16 • **Home Tracks:** Royal Raceway, Peach Circuit, Peach Beach, Peach Gardens, Moonview Highway • **Strengths:** Fast Acceleration

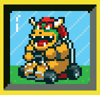
She may be getting constantly rescued in Mario's platforming outings, but Peach is a pretty good racer in Super Mario Kart who's normally first off the starting line in any race.



Toad

Karts Owned: 16 • **Home Tracks:** Toad's Turnpike, Toad's Factory • **Strengths:** Good Control

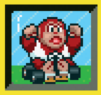
Being rather small in stature it should come as very little surprise to learn that Toad's handling is very, very good. His lack of weight means that he's also very good when it comes to quick starts and a demon on the shorter tracks.



Bowser

Karts Owned: 16 • **Home Tracks:** Bowser's Castle • **Strengths:** High Top Speed

This big brute of a kart racer has the slowest acceleration in the game and is constantly left behind by his peers. Worry not though as his dense weight means that he's excellent on corners and that he has an impressive top speed.



Donkey Kong Jr

Karts Owned: 16 • **Home Tracks:** DK's Jungle Parkway, DK Summit, DK Pass • **Strengths:** High Top Speed

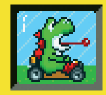
With his bulky physique, broad shoulders and great girth, Donkey Kong Jr (he's grown up in the later games, hence the dropping of Jr) is a furry equivalent to Bowser. Be warned though, like the King of Koopas he's best left to the experts.



Koopa Troopa

Karts Owned: 13 • **Home Tracks:** Koopa Beach 1, Koopa Beach 2, Koopa Troopa Beach, Koopa Cape • **Strengths:** Good Control

Koopa Troopa is the evil – is he evil or just misunderstood – equivalent to Toad and he shares the same excellent handling as his stumpy peer. Nippy and fast, he's great for skilled players.



Yoshi

Karts Owned: 16 • **Home Tracks:** Yoshi Valley, Dry Dry Ruins, Yoshi Falls • **Strengths:** Fast Acceleration

Just like Peach, Yoshi is pretty good in the acceleration department and can quickly tear apart times on some of the shorter tracks. His general lightness though means that he's a little poor on corners and lacks a decent top speed.



» (GBA) With the feather no longer an option, it's down to speed ramps to help you clear larger gaps in the tracks.



» (N64) Although the tracks themselves are 3D, the racers in *Mario Kart 64* are all pre-rendered sprites.





small challenges ranging from racing through correctly numbered gates to collecting coins and smashing crates, and culminating in a boss battle that saw you taking down a huge enemy (often with item support). A seventh, harder set of challenges, then becomes available upon completing the others.

Gameplay additions saw a starting choice of two distinctly different looking karts for each player – it's eventually possible to unlock a total of 32 karts that can be used by any player – and 'drafting', which enabled you to build speed off the racer in front of you, while three new racers also joined the ranks: Dry Bones, R.O.B. and Shy Guy (who only appears in downloadable play). There's even a small drawing program that allows you to create simplistic emblems for use online. Basically, *Mario Kart DS* is easily our favourite game in the franchise after the original, as it takes all the fun of the later games, but also features all the racing elements that were so enjoyable in the SNES original.

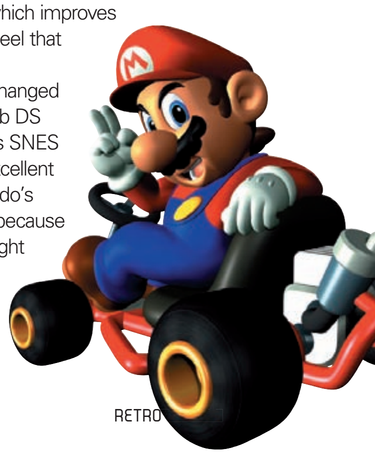
The last addition to the *Mario Kart* canon was released last year on the Wii and, while we're not quite as enamoured with it as we were with *Mario Kart DS*, it remains an enjoyable add-on to the franchise that once again brings new additions to the classic gameplay that has been entertaining gamers now for 17 years.

Online play was now fully available (and pretty flawless it is too, despite Nintendo's relative infancy in this aspect of gaming) and supported 12 players, bikes are included for the first time in the franchise, allowing you to wheelie, which increased your top speed but made it far harder to turn, the benefits of snaking were nullified (you can snake but there's no real point most of the time, as people abuse the bike's wheelie instead usually), and there's even a simple text chat mode that allows you to send pre-written messages to other players online as you're racing them. Tricks were also added to the *Mario Kart* repertoire and successfully pulled off stunts, which were easier to perform on the new bikes, would reward you with a handy mini-turbo, while players were also able to import their Miis into the game to compete against Mario and the other 23 characters that are eventually available. The biggest addition to the game, though, was the brand new control method.

While traditional *Mario Kart* controls can be accessed via the Classic Controller, Remote and Nunchuk or a simple GameCube pad, *Mario Kart Wii* was created to get the most out of the Wii's Remote. By holding the Remote horizontally you're given a surprising amount of control over the on-screen action, which improves dramatically if you use the steering wheel that *Mario Kart Wii* comes with.

Mario Kart's credentials may have changed over recent years – although the superb DS outing is a brilliant return to the glorious SNES days of old – but the series remains excellent fun to play, a testament to both Nintendo's continual crafting of the franchise and because Miyamoto and his time got so much right in the first place. And let's face it, how many franchises manage that?

(Special thanks to Mat Allen for his invaluable help.)



MSX

THE JAPANESE MSX COMPUTER STARTED LIFE AS THE WORLD'S FIRST STANDARDISED COMPUTING HARDWARE BUT ENDED UP BEING NOTHING MORE THAN A HISTORICAL FOOTNOTE. IT DID HAVE SOME BLOODY GOOD GAMES, THOUGH, AS ASHLEY DAY REMEMBERS...





One of the greatest things about the 8-bit micro age was the sheer variety of machines and games available. The boom in popularity of home computing led almost every electronics firm of the day to manufacture their own games machines, and the UK was flooded with all manner of wonderful hardware and games to play on them.

It was a great time to be a games fan but also one of the most turbulent. There were the playground arguments about whose machine was best, of course, but there was also a huge problem for parents who, faced with so many choices, often didn't know which computer to buy. Game developers had the same problem: with new machines hitting the market every month, how could they know which would become successful and, therefore, which they should develop their games for?

And those kids in the playground, they could only share and trade games if they happened to be using the same hardware as their friends.

Surely, the solution to these issues would be one universal hardware format that could eliminate the concerns of consumers and developers and ensure that no matter what game you bought, it would work on your own machine. It was a good idea in principle; after all, it had worked for the home video industry, as competing tape manufacturers gradually gave up on their own formats throughout the Eighties and came to support JVC's VHS standard.

One man with the vision to realise the dream of a unified gaming platform was Kazuhiko Nishi, a prominent figure in the Japanese games industry from its very inception. In 1977 he founded a publishing company called ASCII Corporation, which specialised in games magazines and launched the country's first micro-computer periodical, named *ASCII*, in the same year. In 1979, he joined Microsoft and became the vice president in charge of the Far East and, later, the director and vice president in charge of new technologies, all while maintaining a controlling interest in the ASCII Corporation. And it's during this time that he proposed the MSX standard.

On June 27, 1983, the MSX was officially unveiled to the world as a collaboration between ASCII and Microsoft. The former would control and license the hardware specification, while the latter would program the format's operating system and BASIC language. Impressively, the MSX group had already attracted a huge number of Japanese manufacturers to the cause, and big names like Sony, Toshiba, Panasonic and Yamaha, among many others, announced that they would release their own MSX machines in Japan.

The plan was simple yet brilliant. Every licensed manufacturer would be allowed to create any kind of computer they wished and badge it with the MSX logo as long as it incorporated a strict number of features. These were a Zilog Z80 processor, running at 3.58MHz; a minimum of 8kb RAM; a Texas Instruments TMS9918 Video Display Processor; a General Instruments AY-3-8910 sound chip; and a 32kb ROM containing the MSX BIOS and Microsoft's MSX BASIC. Compatibility between machines was achieved by making sure all models also featured the same keyboard, cartridge slot, and expansion ports, but manufactures could also add their own USPs like additional cartridge slots, tape drives, extra RAM, and so on. Many of these extra features were dictated by the way each company decided to position their own MSX model within the market. Some, like the Toshiba HX10, were sold simply as game machines and were produced to the lowest possible specification to remain affordable and were usually packaged with a pair of joysticks. Yamaha, meanwhile, marketed its MSX models as companions to the company's synthesizer keyboards and consequently built MIDI ports into most of its machines, bundling them with audio leads and music

Year released: 1983 (MSX) 1986 (MSX2) 1988 (MSX2+) 1990 (MSX Turbo R)

Original price: Various. Example - ¥16,500 (Toshiba HX10)

Buy it now for: £10-£80 depending on model

Associated magazines: *What MSX?, MSX Computing, MSX User, MSX Fan, MSX Ouendan*

Why the MSX was great… Though it failed to make a splash in the UK, the MSX was an important machine elsewhere around the world. It was the first taste of home computing for many in Japan, Holland and Brazil, was Microsoft's first real investment in videogames, nearly two decades before the Xbox, and the first computing 'standard'. It is remembered now for its weird and wonderful hardware variations and its catalogue of Japanese games that spawned several evergreen franchises.

> "Manufactures could add USPs like additional cartridge slots, tape drives, and extra RAM" ON THE MSX MODELS

INSTANT EXPERT

- **Nobody really knows** what MSX means. Microsoft claimed that it meant MicroSoft eXtended. Nishi, however, claims that it means Machines with Software eXchangeability.
- **The MSX computer** was popular in parts of Eastern Europe because it was very good at creating subtitles for illegally distributed foreign videotapes.
- **Some Konami games** had both a disk and cartridge in the box, but you'll struggle to find the carts these days. Many of them were bought separately by music enthusiasts for the SCC+ sound chip they contained.
- **Many MSX models** had two cartridge slots. Konami took advantage of this by building secrets into its games that you could only access with two cartridges at once - similar to the way that GBA games often unlock content in DS games now.
- **Konami released so** many MSX games that in 1998 it released a compilation of them for the Saturn and PlayStation. The *Konami Antiques MSX Collection* featured 30 such games but, sadly, no MSX2 titles.
- **The 'Beecard' format** used in NEC's PC Engine console was first used on the MSX. It was manufactured by Hudson and required a special adaptor cartridge to load it.
- ***Metal Gear 2: Solid*** *Snake* is probably the best MSX2 game. It was only officially translated in 2006, however, when it appeared as a bonus feature in *Metal Gear Solid 3: Subsistence* on the PS2.
- **A handful of** the MSX licensees later tried their hand at another 'single format' console: the unsuccessful 3DO.
- **Though Microsoft hasn't** been involved with MSX since 1988, the name lives on in the company: it's the internal product code for the Xbox.
- **A staggering 265** different MSX models are known to exist, but there may be more. Nobody knows exactly how many variations were manufactured.

COMMUNITY MSX SITES TO WATCH

MSX Museum bOX
www.passionmsx.org/msxgamesbox/museum/index.php

MSX Museum bOX is the best way to find out about the many variations of the MSX hardware. Organised by manufacturer and featuring over 200 photographs, it's a comprehensive archive that just keeps growing.



Generation MSX
www.generation-msx.nl

A bit like Lemon64 but for the MSX, this site has spent the last decade attempting to catalogue every MSX game. In addition to the games listings, you'll also find a library of historical images and a forum populated by friendly MSX gamers.



MSX Resource Center
www.msx.org

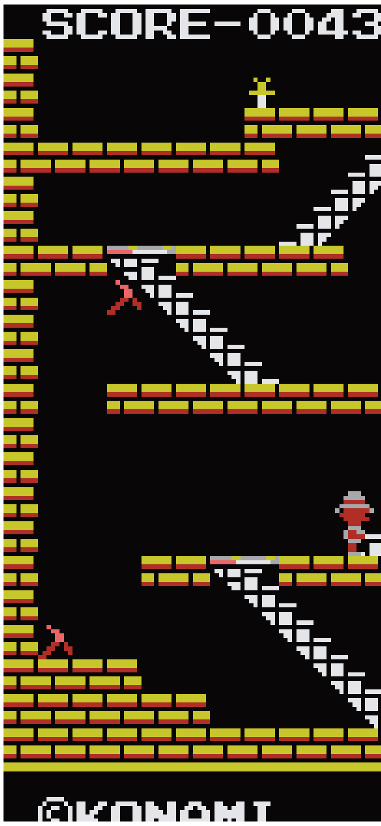
The most comprehensive English-language news service for the MSX. It can get a bit technical sometimes, but if you need to know about new translations and homebrew games, this is your first stop. The forum is friendly and helpful too.



The Ultimate MSX FAQ
www.faq.msxnet.org

As the name suggests, the Ultimate MSX FAQ is comprehensive, with all the info you'd ever need to know about the MSX and its software. Everything is covered, from a history of the project to in-depth analysis of the hardware and relevant info about the fan community.







» The MSX achieved some success in the Netherlands, as evidenced by this example.

software. Others, like Sony, aimed their hardware at the professional markets, fitting the machines with as much RAM as possible and often building floppy disk drives and even Laserdiscs or VHS samplers into the hardware.

The diversity of the early MSX models was instrumental in gaining a foothold in Japan. Consumers could buy with confidence, knowing that any MSX-branded software or hardware they bought would work with their own machine, while the different price brackets meant that dedicated users could buy a high-end machine for the workplace and a much cheaper, but fully compatible, machine for the home. The standard was considered a success and, with the combined force of its licensees, became a worthy contender to other Japanese computers of the time, like NEC's PC98 series.

This early success naturally attracted the attention of a number of videogame publishers and many of Japan's best soon began to support the standard. Konami, Hudson, Square, Compile, Enix and Falcom all developed and published several games for the system, and many of those companies' most famous franchises began life on the MSX.

Having gained a strong position in Japan, the MSX Association naturally set its sights on the US market next, but things didn't go so well this time. The US, of course, had been gripped by Commodore fever since 1982, and only a fool would gamble on an outsider taking away the C64's formidable market share with a technically inferior machine. Only one US company, Spectravideo, bothered to license the standard in 1984 and had little impact on the market. Yamaha also brought some of its MSX models over to the US, but they were marketed under the umbrella of music technology and went ignored by games fans and computing enthusiasts.

"The MSX was attacked as a foreign import" ON THE FAILURE OF THE UK MSX

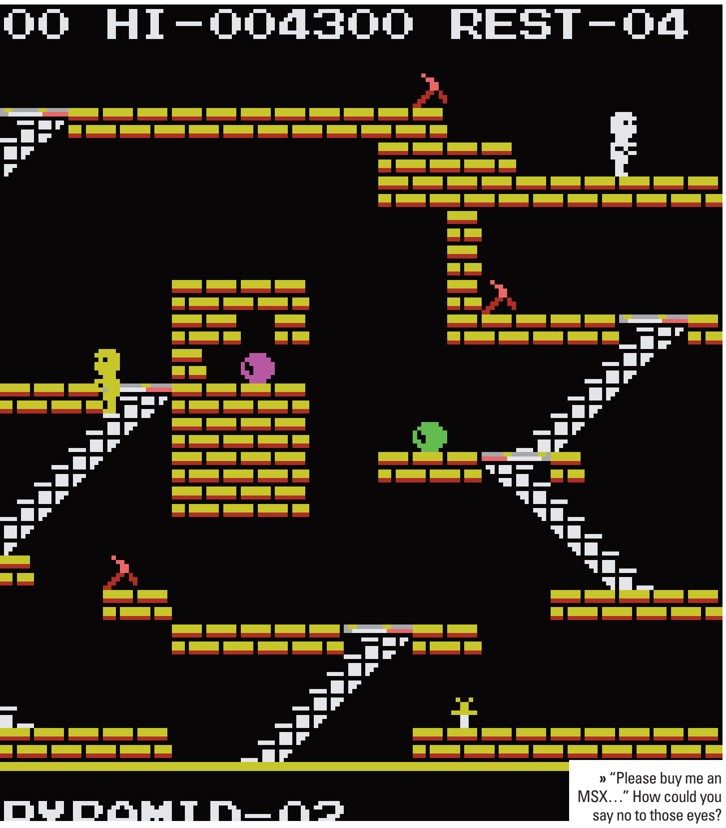
Retreating from the US, never to return, the MSX Association concentrated on other, less monopolised territories instead. Seeing the widespread use of 8-bit micros in Europe, the alliance moved in to take advantage of the eager consumer base. Some of the Japanese licensees, particularly Toshiba, created PAL versions of their low-end machines for Europe, while Dutch electronics giant Philips became an official licensee and one of the format's biggest supporters worldwide.

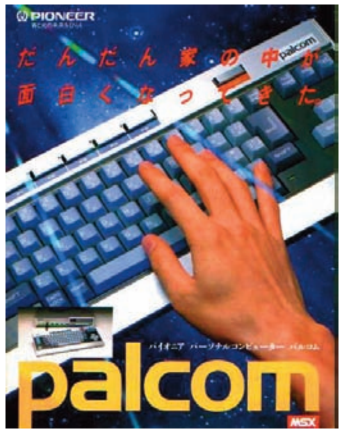
In the UK, the MSX was met with a mixture of indifference and animosity. As in the US, the underpowered hardware made MSX games look weak in comparison to Commodore 64 titles, while the more impressive games, such as Konami's excellent arcade ports, were only released on cartridge and seemed vastly overpriced in comparison to the tape software that most were used to. As a result, the UK MSX became lumbered mostly with second-rate ports of Spectrum games and was once venomously attacked in a *Crash* editorial as a foreign import that could rob British developers of their national identity.

With its confused catalogue of software and one of the country's favourite games magazines dead against the system, the MSX never really took off in the UK, but it did perform well in other parts of Europe. Holland, in particular, embraced the machine with open arms. This was the home country of Philips, after all, which relied upon national goodwill toward its own brand, as well as its truly excellent hardware variations, to take a firm grip of the Dutch computer market. To this day, the MSX remains extremely popular in what is now the Netherlands,

» Kazuhiko Nishi addresses attendees of a Dutch MSX convention in 2001 and reveals his plans for the 'MSX Revival'.

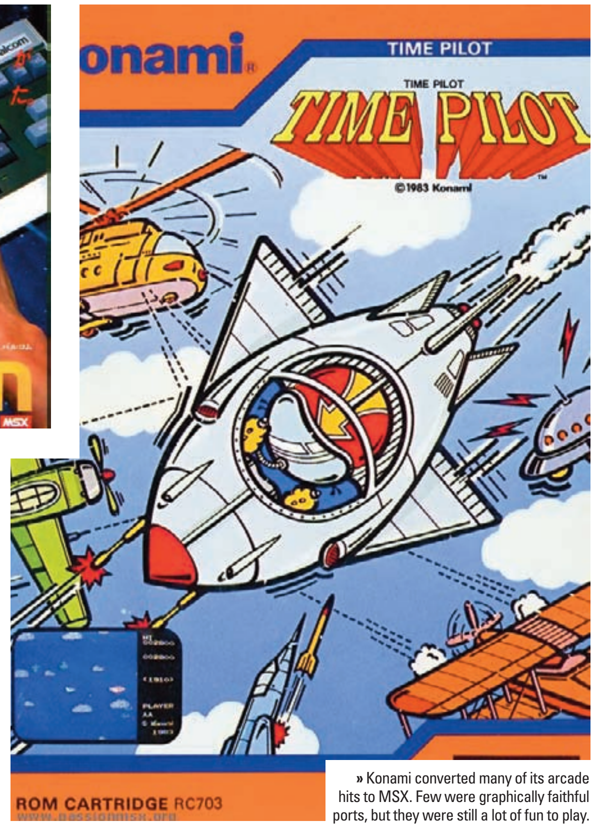








» "Please buy me an MSX…" How could you say no to those eyes?



» Konami converted many of its arcade hits to MSX. Few were graphically faithful ports, but they were still a lot of fun to play.

where it is remembered with the same fondness as the Spectrum and Amstrad are in Britain.

Other territories outside of Japan that also embraced the MSX system include Brazil, which explains the huge number of Portuguese-language fan sites on the web, and Saudi Arabia, where the standard became the first home computer to be made available in the country. Pioneering Saudi Arabian technology affiliates Sakhr and Al-Alamiah licensed several MSX models and created the world's first Arabic word-processing standard around the machines, a move that ensured the companies a place in the computing industry that survives to this day.

Despite its great start in Japan and limited success throughout the rest of the world, the MSX didn't have many more years left in it, and by the mid-Eighties it was starting to look quite dated in comparison to other computers. By 1985, European gamers eagerly cast their gaze westward, to the fledgling Amiga and Atari ST formats with their incredible 16-bit performance. Meanwhile, closer to home, Nintendo's Famicom had achieved dominance of the Japanese videogame industry and threatened to crush MSX under its giant red and white boot. Although both machines were technically both 8-bit, Famicom games appeared far superior thanks to a number of flaws in the MSX design. The way in which the MSX addressed its video RAM was relatively slow and prevented smooth scrolling from screen to screen, thus limiting most of the MSX's games to flip-screen visuals. In addition, the computer's high-res mode wasn't quite up to scratch and created a colour-clash effect similar to the one that plagued Spectrum games.

These flaws were acceptable by the standards of 1983, but they soon made the MSX look old and rusty as new machines entered the market, and so the MSX group designed a new format that could compete with its contemporaries while remaining backwards compatible with the original software. This new standard was simply named MSX2 and, in addition to the usual hardware upgrades such as a faster processor and extra RAM, the graphics chip had five new video display modes built in. Some of these allowed games to play in high-res without colour clash, others were used to display digitised images on title screens or in desktop publishing software. In-game scrolling was slightly smoother on the MSX2, although it did cause some sprite flicker in the most complicated games. Most MSX2 machines also featured a 3.5-inch floppy disk drive, which allowed developers to produce their software at a greatly reduced cost in comparison to cartridges and gave home users a much more reliable storage solution than cassette tapes.

In some ways the MSX2 was a huge success, but in other ways it was an equally large failure. The standard was completely ignored in the US and UK and was not widely adopted in the poorer regions like Eastern Europe and South America, which left only Holland and Japan to keep the MSX flag flying. As before, Philips happily licensed the MSX2 technology and produced some wonderful hardware under the standard. Japanese licensees weren't as supportive as they had been for the original MSX, but many of the biggest manufacturers, such as Sony, Samsung and Panasonic, continued their support and created all manner of MSX2 units.

Although the MSX's global presence was notably shrinking, the support of manufacturers in Japan and Holland ensured that the format held on to its two key territories and many game developers consequently stayed with the machine. Konami, the biggest Japanese developer of MSX games, had moved on to the Famicom but had kept its MSX division alive, and it is in the MSX2 period that this division created its greatest games and, therefore, the best games on the system. With *Metal Gear* creator Hideo Kojima still posted to the MSX

» Kazuhiko Nishi: the father of the MSX.





VERSIONS SOME OF THE BEST



NATIONAL FS4500

Japan's National Corporation licensed the MSX format in order to create its own series of word processors, and the FS4500 is one of the most interesting. Not only does it have plenty of software built in, but the hardware includes a 24-dot thermal printer.



NTT CAPTAIN

CAPTAIN stood for Character And Pattern Telephone Access Information Network and was an early state-run BBS in Japan that looked similar to Teletext. NTT created machines that allowed home users to access the BBS and this particular model was MSX2-compatible.



TOSHIBA HX10

If you're from the UK and owned an MSX in the Eighties, chances are you owned the Toshiba HX10. It was the most widely available model and is still the one most often seen on eBay. It's a basic, unremarkable MSX model, but it came with lots of documentation.



ZEMMIX CPC-50

This console was manufactured by Daewoo and released only in Korea, where its software arm, Zemina, supported the console. The majority of its cartridges were apparently unofficial versions of Japanese Konami games and hacks of Nintendo Famicom games.



1CHIPMSX

The last official MSX hardware was created as recently as 2006 by the MSX Association and D4 Enterprise, which plays real cartridges or ROMs from an SD card. The console was intended for European release in 2007 but those plans have seemingly failed.





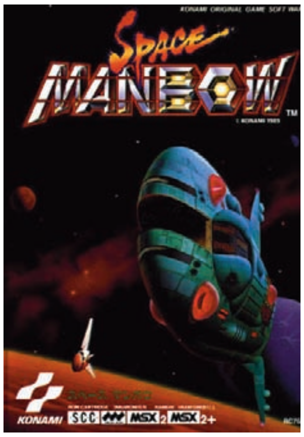
» Caught on camera: this still from a Nineties news report shows a Sony MSX machine in use aboard the International Space Station.

» The MSX has an extremely healthy homebrew following, kept active by yearly competitions and fairs. There are some great little arcade-style games available as ROMs or even semi-professional disks and carts.









» *Penguin Adventure*, one of the best MSX games and one of the most emotional title screens in history.



team, the format benefited greatly from the designer's newest creations like *Metal Gear 2: Solid Snake*, *Snatcher*, and *SD Snatcher*. Other Konami teams also created their own brilliant games, such as the horizontal shoot-'em-up *Space Manbow*, *Ganbare Goemon* (*Mystical Ninja*), and *Vampire Killer* (*Castlevania*). The likes of Capcom, Compile, Namco and Taito all released games for the MSX2, many of which were arcade conversions that were much more accurate than their MSX equivalents, and the format received a known 1,200 games in its lifetime. But that wouldn't be enough to save the MSX's skin…

Ever aware that the MSX was fighting a losing battle, Kazuhiko Nishi struggled to understand why more people were not interested in his machine. Offering an MSX to his grandmother, he pointed out all of the things she could do with it. "You can write letters," he said. But she told him she could already do that with a pen and paper. "You can work out stock prices," he countered, to which she held up her calculator. Finally, he explained that she could use the machine for entertainment. "But," she said, "I have a TV for that."

Nishi thought long and hard about how he could make the MSX relevant to the lives of ordinary people. He considered technologies that had been widely adopted throughout Japanese households like television, radio, and the telephone and realised that they all had one thing in common: they existed in a communications network. If only he could network all of the MSX systems to communicate with each other, as well as receive software from a remote broadcaster, then consumers would feel like they were missing out on something without one in their home. He was, of course, thinking about the internet, but this was 1986 and such technology was still in its infancy, way out of the reach of affordable home electronics for at least another ten years.

In the meantime, the MSX group took another stab at perfecting the hardware, although this time they did it without Microsoft, which had washed its hands of the MSX and declined to improve any of the built-in software. This was presumably because the IBM PC was picking up speed in the west and Microsoft didn't need to compete with its own Windows 2.0 operating system.

In 1988, instead of creating an entirely new machine, ASCII designed the MSX2+, which included a built-in 9-channel FM synthesizer, the ability to display still images in up to 19,000 colours, and three new video modes, one of which totally eliminated the flickery scrolling that had plagued the MSX since 1983. The hardware itself featured two sliding dials – one to change hardware speed and the other to enable auto-fire – as well as an import-friendly RGB output.

Sadly, but quite inevitably, support of the MSX2+ was even weaker than for the previous two machines. As the new machine was quite rightly seen as a meagre update to the MSX2 and not a serious market challenger, most MSX licensees didn't see the point in producing new hardware. Only Sony, Sanyo, and Panasonic ever developed any MSX2+ computers, and

only a handful of games were ever made exclusively for the system.

When it became time to think about creating an MSX3 in 1990, Nishi cast aside his ambitious network ideas and set his sights on the CD-ROM. Noting that console manufacturers like Sega and NEC planned to add CD-ROM drives to their consoles, ASCII considered integrating CD-ROM as standard into the next MSX hardware but eventually decided against it because it felt the seven-year-old medium would soon be superseded. It was right, of course, but it would take another seven years before DVD would materialise.

Not embracing the CD-ROM was arguably the last straw for the MSX manufacturers. Philips, the original creator of the CD, hadn't supported MSX for some time and by 1990 it was clear why. The Dutch giant was working on its own computer technology, the CD-based CD-i, which was sure to be capable of much more than the now extremely dated-looking MSX. Sony, likewise, had moved away from MSX and toward CD, as it worked secretly with Nintendo on the SNES-CD project, which was due for release in 1991 but would eventually resurface in 1993 as the Sony PlayStation.

By 1990, the list of MSX licensees had dwindled to just one: Panasonic, which helped create the final MSX standard, known as the Turbo R. Two variations of this underpowered 16-bit machine were created, but both went by unnoticed. The Turbo R was too little, too late. The format's once-loyal developers knew it and shifted their allegiance over to Nintendo, Sega and NEC, if they hadn't already done so. The MSX was dead and Nishi finally turned his back on the system, choosing to concentrate on ASCII's other business interests and taking a job as a Media Engineering lecturer at the Tokyo Institute of Technology.

In truth, though, the MSX had really died around the introduction of the 2+. The earliest success of the MSX came from a strength in numbers, afforded by the combined brand identities and market presence of the system's licensees. But as ASCII failed to improve upon the MSX specifications in ways that appealed to those licensees, their numbers dwindled to the point where not enough machines were manufactured to attract the software developers. From there the MSX fell into a spiral of decline. As fewer developers created new software, the machines became less attractive to consumers and licensees saw fewer reasons to manufacture more hardware. And then, of course, IBM and Microsoft virtually created the modern-day computing standard with the Windows-based PC, a format so successful

"Nishi was thinking about the internet in 1986, when such tech was still in its infancy" THE UNFULFILLED FUTURE

that it relegated the MSX to the status of failed experiment.

And that's where our story ends.

Except it doesn't, because in 2001 Kazuhiko Nishi made a shock appearance at an MSX fair in Tilburg, the Netherlands, and announced his plans to revive the MSX format. Speaking to surprised attendees at the show, Nishi openly discussed the lengthy history of the MSX format and declared that there was still a place in the world for the MSX.

As it turns out, that place wasn't a brand new world-conquering system but an actual 'revival' that would enable new users, as well as enthusiasts, to experience the retro MSX in a brand new way. Under the name of the MSX Association, of which Nishi is the chairman, the revival began with the release of the MSXPLAYer, a small USB device that allows real MSX cartridges to be plugged into a PC and played on an official MSX emulator. Next, the association worked with D4 Enterprise on Project EGG, another official emulation program that allowed both old and new MSX software to be downloaded for a small fee and played on a PC. A European version of this project, called WOOMB.net, was also started by a company called Bazix in 2006, but it was sadly discontinued in June 2008, due to a disagreement with the MSX Association.

Finally, in 2006, the MSX Association teamed with D4 Enterprise and ESE Artists' Factory to produce the first new MSX hardware in sixteen years. Known as the 1chipMSX, the new hardware uses an FPGA chip with the full MSX2 chipset programmed into it and can play commercial MSX cartridges as well as downloaded ROMs on an SD card. The 1chipMSX is due to be released in Europe in the future, once the MSX Association finds a suitable distributor. Until then, if you want one you'll have to keep an eye on eBay or trawl a few game stores in Tokyo, where **Retro Gamer** found our own unit.

Quite what the future holds for the MSX, we do not know, but we doubt that it will remain a relic of the past like so many other 8-bit micros of its time. The original creator still holds the rights to the name and is clearly intent on keeping it alive, and when it comes to a guy like Nishi, who can throw the sort of curve balls that he did with the announcement of the latest MSX revival, literally anything could happen in the next few years.

KONAMI KOMBOS

Several MSX machines had two cartridge slots built in, a feature that Konami made smart use of by unlocking cheats and Easter eggs in some of its games by combining them with others. Here are some of the most interesting combinations to try.

- ***Yie Ar Kung-Fu 2* with *Yie Ar Kung-Fu*** - Just before death, your father appears with a nice cup of tea.
- ***Nemesis* with *Twinbee*** - Replaces the Vic Viper with a Twinbee and the power-ups with bells.
- ***Ganbare Goemon* with *Q*Bert*** - Unlocks a hidden level select mode and pause function.
- ***The Maze Of Galious* with *Knightmare*** - You can revive the player 99 times rather than the standard one.
- ***Nemesis 2* with *Penguin Adventure*** - Changes the Vic Viper to a penguin and power-ups to fish.
- ***Usas* with *Metal Gear*** - You lose half the usual amount of energy
- ***Salamander* with *Nemesis 2*** - Unlocks a secret final level.

SPECIFICATIONS

MSX: 3.58MHz Z80 processor, 8kb-128kb RAM, 16kb video RAM, 256x192 resolution (with 16 colours), AY-3-8910 sound chip

MSX2: 3.58MHz Z80 processor, 64kb-512kb RAM, 128kb video RAM, 512x212 resolution (with 16 colours), 256x212 resolution (with 256 colours), YM2149 sound chip

MSX Turbo R: 7.16MHz R800 processor, 256kb-512kb RAM, 128kb video RAM, 256x212 resolution, YM2149 sound chip







PERFECT TEN GAMES

Owing to its high cost, and non-existent retail support, the MSX was constantly overshadowed by the Spectrum, C64 and the CPC in the UK. It's a real shame because the MSX provided a whole host of fantastic games, and even proved the early stomping ground for many of videogames' most popular franchises. Here's the proof.

SPACE MANBOW

- » **RELEASED:** 1989
- » **PUBLISHER:** KONAMI
- » **CREATED BY:** KONAMI
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SPARKSTER

01 **Not only the** greatest shoot-'em-ups on the MSX, but one of the best shoot-'em-ups period. Konami's wonderfully titled *Space Manbow* is a mesmerising tour de force for the machine that captivates and engages from its opening level – a wonderfully grounded take on the Bydo frigate stage in *R-Type*. From here the game continues to impress, thanks to fantastic arcade visuals, a strident soundtrack and frenetic shoot-'em-up action, which scrolls smoothly, both vertically and horizontally, with very little slowdown when things get busy. While rare and expensive to come by these days – a complete boxed version will cost you around £100 – *Space Manbow* is wholly worth seeking out for any MSX collection.

ALESTE 2

- » **RELEASED:** 1990
- » **PUBLISHER:** COMPILE
- » **CREATED BY:** COMPILE
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** PUYO PUYO

02 **Three *Aleste* games** appeared on the MSX, and all are worth seeking out. While the final game in the trio, *Gaiden*, would supplement air, jets and spacecrafts with Japanese robots suits and floor, there's really not much separating the games in terms of their quality. Compiles' popular shoot-'em-up franchise is fabled for its repetitious open-feeling levels, fast-paced gameplay, deep weapon system and a neat mechanic whereby the very touch of a power-up will grant you momentary invulnerability. As we can only pick one game, it has to be *Aleste 2* because it looks superb, allows you to select your weapons at the start of the game, and is the first title in the canon to feature reoccurring protagonist Ellinor.



01

PENGUIN ADVENTURE

- » **RELEASED:** 1987
- » **PUBLISHER:** KONAMI
- » **CREATED BY:** HIDEO KOJIMA (KONAMI)
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SNATCHER

03 **This follow up** to *Antarctic Adventure* finds heroic penguin Pentaro seeking a cure for a sick penguin princess who has succumbed to a deadly plague. Getting shot to notoriety late in life for being Hideo Kojima's first published title for Konami, *Penguin Adventure* is one of the finest, and most tech-savvy games, to appear on the MSX. The game is essentially an action racing game, viewed from that into the screen perspective, and starring a cast of sickeningly cute penguins. Penguin games simply don't get better than this.

VAMPIRE KILLER

- » **RELEASED:** 1986
- » **PUBLISHER:** KONAMI
- » **CREATED BY:** KONAMI
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** GRADIUS

04 **Booting up the** more established NES port beside this one reveals that Konami made a few changes to the gameplay for the MSX2. *Vampire Killer*, which marks the first time a Belmont ever set a foot down on European soil, swaps out and out action for a more considered 'search for a bunch of keys in a castle' action, and is no better for it. Why Konami felt the need to go and mess with the original is a mystery – we can only think that perhaps Konami felt that people who play games with keyboards need something deeper to sink their teeth into. Anyway, *Vampire Killer* is still immensely playable and is a must have for any MSX collection.

BOMBER MAN

- » **RELEASED:** 1984
- » **PUBLISHER:** HUDSON SOFT
- » **CREATED BY:** HUDSON SOFT
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** MARIO PARTY

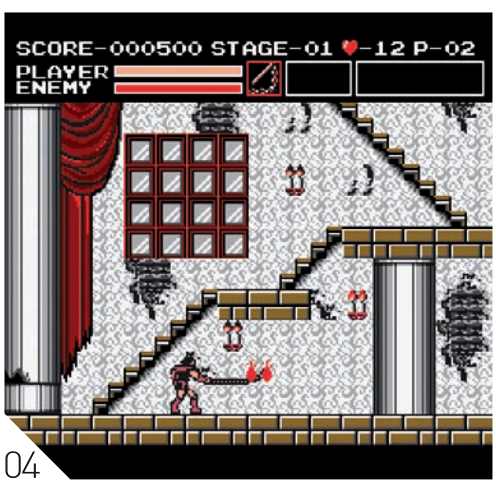
05 **Spectrum owners will** recognise this game as *Eric And The Floaters*, but the game's MSX version went under the more familiar and seminal title of *Bomber Man*, and marked the first appearance of Hudson Soft's infamous bombardier. This maze-based action game finds our hero looking less like a cute Japanese robot and more like Miner Willy (circa *Jet Set* era) with a blue mullet (only visible in the MSX version). Wonderfully addictive, and brilliantly simple to grasp, while there are far better versions of the game available now, this early effort proves good games never die.



02



03



04



05

SPECIAL THANKS TO GENERATION-MSX.NL FOR ADDITIONAL SCREENS







06



07



08

METAL GEAR 2: SOLID SNAKE

» **RELEASED:** 1990
» **PUBLISHER:** KONAMI
» **CREATED BY:** HIDEO KOJIMA
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** POLICENAUGHTS

06 **As if the** games themselves weren't confusing enough, the timeline doesn't help. There are actually two versions of *Metal Gear 2* – one by Konami that was released for the NES, the other by Kojima that was released for the MSX. To be frank, both games are good, but the MSX sequel is the better game. For a start it has its creator back at the helm, secondly it introduced a bunch of popular characters into the series, such as Campbell, Miller and Gray Fox, and it also employed some nice touches to the gameplay, like using carrier pigeons, hang-gliding and even tap codes.

SD SNATCHER

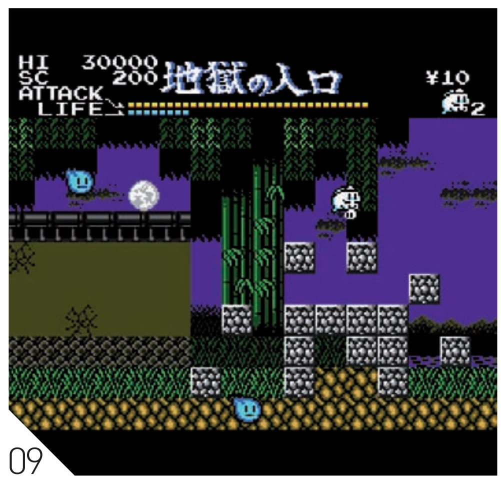
» **RELEASED:** 1990
» **PUBLISHER:** KONAMI
» **CREATED BY:** HIDEO KOJIMA
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** ZOE: ZONE OF THE ENDERS

07 **Like *Metal Gear*** before it, Kojima succeeds in creating an emotive narrative around the limitations of the hardware. Following a similar plot to the original – Gillian is still trying to eradicate the body-pinching Snatchers – this switches the cinematic anime look of the original for a more cartoon feel. It also drops the point-and-click comic book gameplay for an overhead *Zelda* perspective. Engaging enemies in combat also switches the viewpoint to a first-person battle screen, where players could pinpoint specific body parts they wanted to attack. Easily one of the most immersive adventure games on the system.

GOLVELLIUS 2

» **RELEASED:** 1987
» **PUBLISHER:** COMPILE
» **CREATED BY:** COMPILE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** ALESTE

08 **Compile had an** excellent track record on the MSX. Sadly, though, the company closed its doors in 1992 and many millions of people wept into their MSXs. Anyway, if you're looking for a *Zelda*-like adventure for your machine you won't go far wrong with *Golvellius 2*. The series began life on the MSX and the Master System, but would later get a confusingly titled remake for the MSX2. Viewed from a similar perspective, and featuring an overworld style map and dungeon exploration similar to *Zelda*, the game's fluidity, action, visuals and variety make it a real must for any role-playing game fan.



09

YUUREIKUN (AKA MR. GHOST)

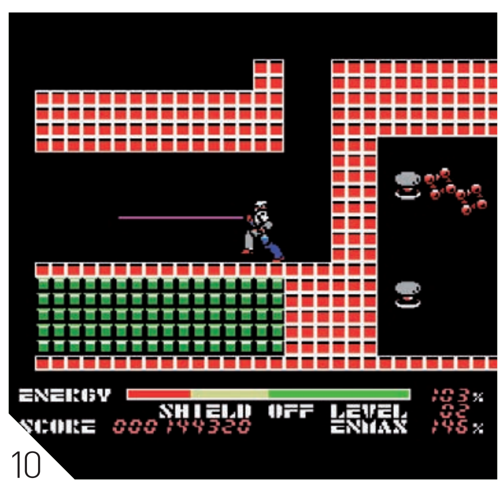
» **RELEASED:** 1989
» **PUBLISHER:** SYSTEM SACOM
» **CREATED BY:** SYSTEM SACOM
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** MARCHEN VEIL

09 ***Mr. Ghost* is** a side, and vertical (the game alternates between the two), scrolling shoot-'em-up where you play a buck-toothed ghost who's being bullied by other ghosts, jumping spiders, and crows, probably about his prominent teeth. *Mr. Ghost* plays remarkably close to Irem's *Mr Heli*, so much so that they could, in fact, be related. Both games let your character move in eight directions, both allow you to deform parts of the environment, and both have a super-deformed look to them. What sets this game aside, though, is its combat system. Mr Ghost dispatches a little sperm looking ghost at enemies and can only redeploy him after he's returned. Mr Ghost can also perform a bum rush to destroy enemies sneaking up behind him or break bricks.

THEXDER

» **RELEASED:** 1986
» **PUBLISHER:** GAME ARTS
» **CREATED BY:** GAME ARTS
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** GRANDIA

10 **This great giant** robo side-scrolling shoot-'em-up is a great example of the genre. The player assumes the role of a *Robotech*-esque robot with the power to transform into a jet plane (the transformation effect in the game is actually pretty impressive), and must negotiate a series of labyrinthine stages – often by repeatedly switching between the robot's two forms – before getting blown to smithereens by patrolling enemy droids. It's a really simple premise but one that becomes strangely addictive. The puzzle/strategy element, and honing laser (which is only available to you in your robot form) also kind of gives *Thexder* an air of *Bangai-O* (admittedly only a very slight one), which can only be a good thing.



10

MSX and the rest...

With its eclectic range of British and Japanese titles, there's nothing quite like ploughing through the MSX's back catalogue. How many of the following games do you remember playing?

01 DECATHLON
02 MSX SOCCER
03 STAR SOLDIER
04 MR. DO!
05 BLAGGER
06 ALESTE
07 10-YARD FIGHT
08 SINBAD
09 PAC-MANIA
10 OUTRUN
11 MAPPY
12 CIRCUS CHARLIE
13 ARCTIC
14 RAMBO
15 Q*BERT
16 THE FAIRYLAND STORY
17 ELEVATOR ACTION
18 TEAR OF NILE
19 PITFALL!
20 BRUCE LEE
21 VAMPIRE KILLER
22 MSX RUBY
23 YIE AR KUNG FU
24 PREDATOR
25 1942
26 ALIEN 8
27 BANK PANIC
28 DRUID
29 MOON PATROL
30 IKARI
31 SEWER SAM
32 ZOIDS
33 SPACE MANBOW
34 PITFALL 2
35 ACTMAN
36 B.C.'S QUEST FOR TIRES
37 COASTER RACE
38 KORONIS RIFT
39 KING KONG 2
40 FANTASY ZONE
41 THE GOONIES
42 HANG ON
43 TIME PILOT
44 ZANAC EX
45 TETRIS
46 RASTAN SAGA
47 LODE RUNNER
48 ARKANOID 2
49 BACK TO THE FUTURE
50 HYPER SPORTS
51 HEROES OF THE LANCE
52 DRAGON QUEST
53 GALAGA
54 PAC-MAN
55 HOLE IN ONE
56 GRADIUS II





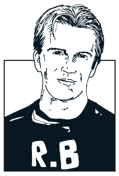
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SIR LANCELOT

WE CLIMB WHENEVER WE'RE ABLE



» **PUBLISHER:** MELBOURNE HOUSE
» **RELEASED:** 1984
» **GENRE:** PLATFORM GAME
» **FEATURED HARDWARE:** SPECTRUM
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £1



HISTORY

While the Spectrum's platform gaming holy trinity of *Manic Miner*, *Jet Set Willy* and *Dynamite Dan* sat at the top table, taking all the accolades and plaudits, one platforming gem somehow slipped under many a gamer's radar.

Sir Lancelot by Melbourne House saw you attempt to progress through 24 rooms of a castle, gathering the treasure as you went and escaping through the exit that appears once it's been successfully stockpiled.

Originality may not be its strong point, but *Sir Lancelot* still manages to crowbar a couple of interesting touches into the well-trod formula. For example, you can only move upwards on ladders, which requires a bit of forethought in planning your passage through the screen as you can easily cut yourself off from the treasure, making it inaccessible and forcing you to sacrifice a life to restart. It looks simple but is anything but.

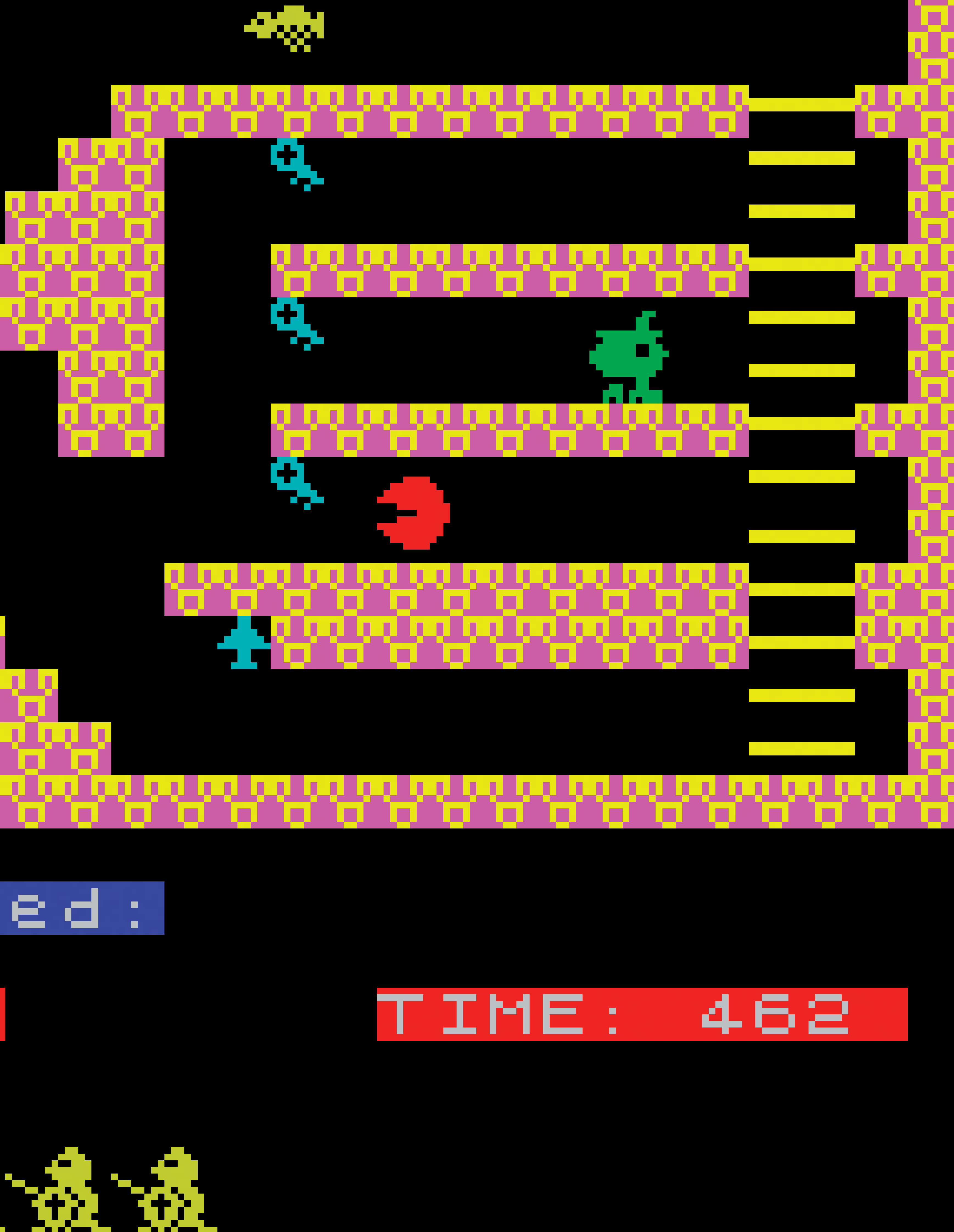
Another quirky touch is the ability to move while falling – no infinite death falls here – allowing you to reach seemingly inaccessible ledges.

The pace of the game is frenetic and for good reason, as the countdown timer fizzes away at such a rate of knots that dawdling around the screen sightseeing just isn't possible. However, the fast tempo really piles on the pressure and helps push things along nicely.

What is really amazing about the game is, although it looks and plays like a 48K game, it's actually a 16K release. That's four more screens than *Manic Miner* in a third of the space. Does the game suffer for it? Not in the slightest. The graphics are adequate yet cute, and Lancelot is smoothly animated as he bounces around the screens like a hyperactive kid gorging on Sherbet Saucers and full-fat Cola.

The only quibble you could level at *Sir Lancelot* is when you die. The torturously slow rise from grave to heaven with accompanying funeral march seems to take an absolute eternity. Good job for emulators with 8x speed-up options…




ed:
TIME: 462

THE MAKING OF...

ROBOTRON: 2084

A favourite of gamers old and young and one of the most relentless and frenetic shoot-'em-ups ever devised, Robotron: 2084 is a first-rate creation. Craig Grannell talks to designer Eugene Jarvis about his game's path from Berzerk! wannabe to timeless classic, and the epiphany that resulted in a revolutionary control system that's still in use today

IN THE KNOW



» **PUBLISHERS:** WILLIAMS ELECTRONICS

» **DEVELOPER:** EUGENE JARVIS FOR WILLIAMS ELECTRONICS

» **RELEASED:** 1982

» **PLATFORMS:** ARCADE (LATER CONVERTED TO VARIOUS HOME SYSTEMS)

» **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP

» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £750+ FOR AN ORIGINAL CABINET

It's the early Eighties and *Defender* has been released to much acclaim. Designer Eugene Jarvis, who initially based his iconic horizontal blaster on *Space Invaders* and *Asteroids*, is playing another early title when inspiration strikes for perhaps his most famous creation – *Robotron: 2084*. "*Berzerk!* was amazing, but I got frustrated playing it, because you had to move towards enemies to shoot them. As they closed in it was hard to kill them without them killing you," remembers Eugene. "One day, I realised if you hold the fire button down, your player remains stationary, but you can still move the joystick to fire bullets."

For Eugene, this was a 'Eureka!' moment. "A lightbulb went off in my head – 'the joystick fires the bullets'. I then thought why not have two joysticks – one to move and one to fire? It was so obvious – such a natural control method!" In one fell swoop, Eugene devised a breakthrough gaming mechanic for his new title, and one that perseveres to this day – although in typically modest fashion, he notes that if he hadn't thought of it, "someone else would have".

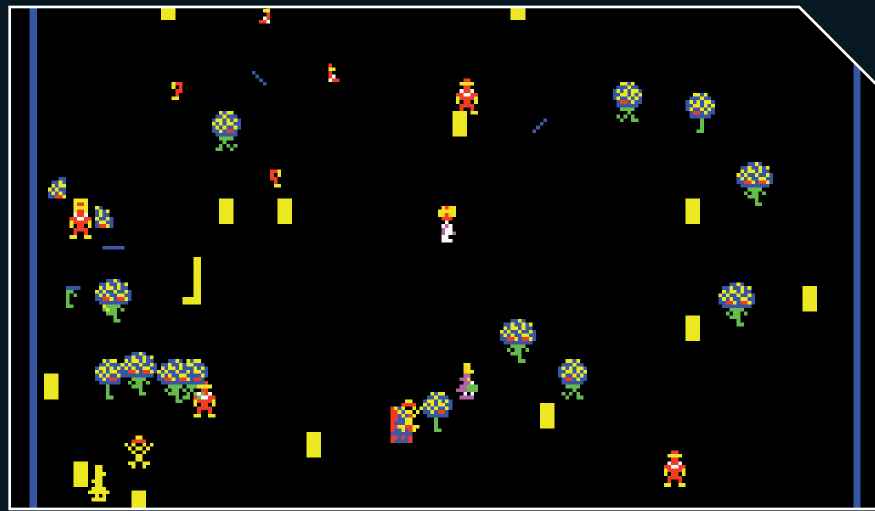
The control method was duly worked into a game Eugene had already started, which, like *Berzerk!*, was based on *Robots*. "Initially, you had to get robots to collide and destroy each other, but that was too passive – after playing *Defender* and *Stargate* for two years, you gotta kill things," he laughs. "So that's when the 'shooting joystick' came into play."

By utilising a dual-joystick approach, Eugene says his game became more life-like, enabling you to retreat from a foe while shooting at it, adding freedom in terms of firing. However, there was little freedom in the environment, with *Robotron* confining you to a single screen – a retro decision even in 1982, especially following *Defender*'s scrolling universe. "*Robotron*'s beauty is in its confinement and intensity," argues Eugene, likening it to *Space Invaders*, but with enemies approaching from all angles. "When we first tried this, it really grabbed our attention – there were no safe areas, because foes were coming at you from everywhere."

With such an escalation of warfare, other components were needed. First, a stronger enemy required a stronger player, to ensure balance of power, hence the plentiful projectiles the player's weapon spews. Secondly, a rescue theme was introduced,



» Eugene was keen to add a story to *Robotron*. You must save the last human family from robots.



» [GBA] The GBA's lack of buttons means its conversion is a case of 'pick up and play – and then put down again'. A DS version, on the other hand…

"THEY'RE ROBOTRON'S EVIL OTTO. IT'S COOL HAVING AN INDESTRUCTIBLE ENEMY – THEY ADD INTEREST TO THE GAME, BECAUSE YOU HAVE TO GO AROUND THEM" EUGENE JARVIS ON THE GREEN HULKS

transplanted from *Defender*. "This was added so the game wasn't just about killing everything," says Eugene. "We got to tell a story, with different characters, and used rescuing clones of the last human family for progressive scoring." He explains that once you're up to 5,000 points, you become motivated to try for more, since 25,000 points provides an extra life. "The character of the game changes – you become almost suicidal in order to grab humans!"

Further gameplay richness is provided by *Robotron*'s cast, which grew as the game was developed. First up were static, deadly Electrodes and simple-minded GRUNTs (Ground Roving Unit Network Terminators), a foe that closely paid homage to the inspirational *Robots*. "GRUNTs were designed to make the player feel surrounded and trapped from all sides," says Eugene, adding that GRUNTs are simply programmed to take the shortest path to you – something that rapidly amplified the game's intensity. "I'd been working on the game for a few days when we got rudimentary GRUNTs going, and we said, let's play with ten. That was kinda fun, so how about 50? How about 100? It was killer, and the funny thing was that with the dual-joystick thing, we ended up blowing a path through GRUNTs when surrounded, returning to *Berzerk!*-style shooting in the direction you're moving!"

In a sense, the Electrodes and GRUNTs shifted *Robotron* towards its main source of inspiration in another way, too. Although *Robotron*'s single screens lack walls, myriad enemies almost create a maze, albeit one that continually shifts; enemies appear randomly on screen at the start of each level, and the player has two seconds to take in the playfield and decide where to go. Another interesting element, according to Eugene, is the GRUNTs' speed. "They go towards you at an ever-accelerating pace, but are never faster than you. This gives you a chance, but GRUNTs cut corners and always close in on you."

According to Eugene, the next enemy designed, indestructible green Hulks that kill humans they collide with, were also inspired by *Berzerk!*. "They're *Robotron*'s Evil Otto. It's cool having an indestructible enemy – they add interest to the game, because you have to go around them, although we helped the player out a bit by enabling you to fire at Hulks to temporarily keep them at bay."

At this point, no enemies fired projectiles of their own, and so the levitating Enforcer was devised. "We liked the idea of a levitating robot, and it was also cheaper than animating something walking," laughs Eugene. The Enforcer also continued a thread from *Defender*, providing the illusion of enemy intelligence via projective algorithms. "The simplest thing you can do is calculate the angle from the enemy to the player and shoot directly, but if the player's in motion, the enemy always

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

NARC (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR: 1988

DEFENDER
SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR: 1980

SMASH TV
SYSTEMS: ARCADE
YEAR: 1990



ROBOBUGS

Like *Defender*, *Robotron* has bugs that weren't discovered until the game was shipped, the most interesting of which is known as the Mikey bug. "Due to a programming error, when you enter a Brain wave, they're supposed to seek the closest human, but they all go after the same one – initially Mikey," explains Eugene. "If no humans are killed, they'll keep seeking the same one, and if you figure out where the Brains are going and keep that person alive, you can keep the Brains from reprogramming any humans. That's a key strategy for getting bonuses – keep the Brains on one person and you can get the maximum amount of 5,000 points for each human saved."

Elsewhere, hardware limitations caused another quirk: if Tanks fire 20 shots that don't hit anything, they decide to become pacifists and cease firing – a rare quality in the frenetic and ceaselessly violent world of *Robotron*!

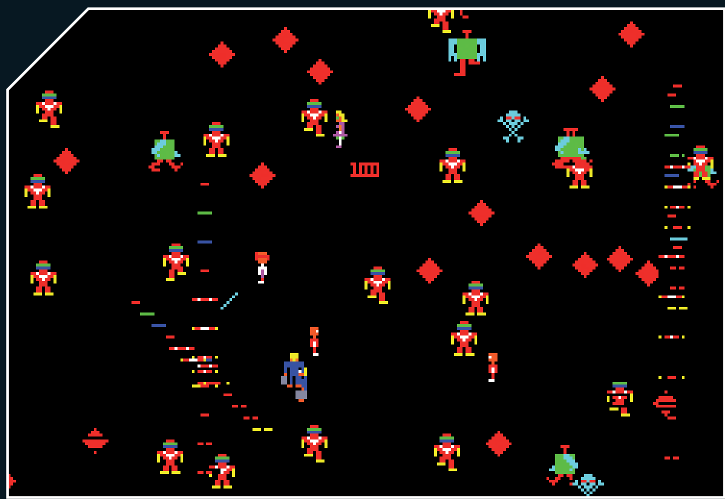


» Tanks fire huge projectiles that bounce around the screen, adding to what Eugene calls "a nice chemistry of shots".

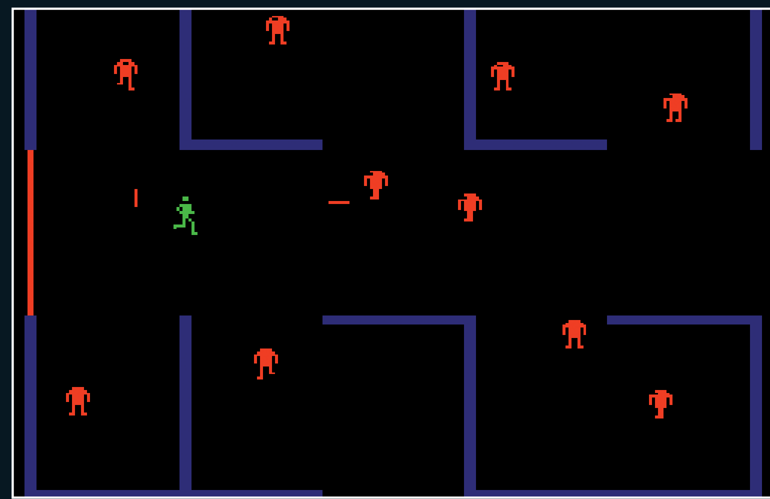


THE MAKING OF... ROBOTRON: 2084

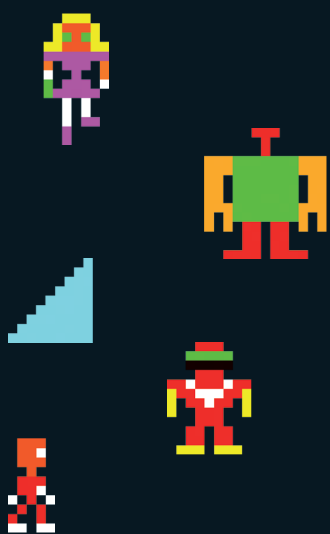




» *Robotron* has interactive explosions, but instead of enemies exploding in a shower of particles, their scanlines fly apart.



» *Berzerk!* provided much of the initial inspiration for *Robotron*, although Eugene's game is faster and tougher.



misses," explains Eugene. "Therefore, we added random direction – instead of shooting directly at the player, Enforcers shoot within ten pixels of your location, and therefore might still hit you."

With some projectiles taking into account the player's velocity, thereby aiming at where you're heading, and having random acceleration to make their paths curve, you might swear they're sometimes seeking you, but that's not the case – they're just using parameters available when shots are made. Interestingly, because of the 'cheap form of division' used to determine distances between enemy and player, Enforcer shots always arrive in the same time-frame, regardless of distance travelled. "The further you are from an enemy, the faster the shots get, and so it's almost safer to be nearer the enemies," explains Eugene. Although counter-intuitive, this is a gameplay mechanic seasoned players exploit – as Eugene says, "If you try running into corners, life can be short, especially since projectiles that hit walls just follow their lines, funnelling into corners."

Eugene also decided to make Enforcer spawning rather different to that of GRUNTs and Hulks, utilising the concept of a monster generator, a key component of later games like *Gauntlet*. "The Spheroid was devised to deposit little embryos of Enforcers around the screen. Shoot the 'mother' and offspring not yet birthed also perish," explains Eugene. "But if you die, the generators reappear and birth more. You can get into this steady-state situation where you keep dying and they keep generating – it's like you can never get them out of the way, unlike in *Defender*, which always has a fixed number of enemies."

To keep the balance of power intact, Eugene decided to enable players to shoot enemy projectiles, adding an element of defence, but it wasn't long before another foe was added: Brains. These were considered master controllers, preying on humans, turning them into brainwashed Progs that incessantly hone in on the player. "Their defence is a cruise-missile projectile that seeks you out, but in a random fashion," says Eugene. "It sometimes goes away from you and comes back, seeking a random spot around you, often killing you in the process (laughs), but this adds suspense. As they come at you, you're not sure what's going to happen."

Robotron survived in this form for a few months, but Eugene's partner on the game, Larry DeMar, then announced he wanted another enemy, the Tank. "We needed something else to punish the player and take their money, and so we created the Tank, which shoots what are essentially high-velocity ping-pong balls at you that bounce around the sides of the screen," says Eugene.

With a large selection of foes, bullets and humans populating *Robotron*'s single-screens, and technology being limited, the game's graphics were understandably basic. It was vital to make each character distinct and ensure



BLASTING BLASTER

Although Eugene planned sequels for *Robotron*, *Blaster* became the only title set in the same universe. "It's trying to throw *Defender*'s gameplay into a 3D environment, to capture the rush of flying through space," explains Eugene.

Of his early games, Eugene considers *Blaster* the weakest, because of the inherent problems of 3D. "It's exciting, stimulating and emotionally captivating through the imagery, but the player has incomplete information, and poor manoeuvrability. You can't see threats behind you – you just have a cone of visibility. And so you get killed by things you never saw, which players consider unfair."

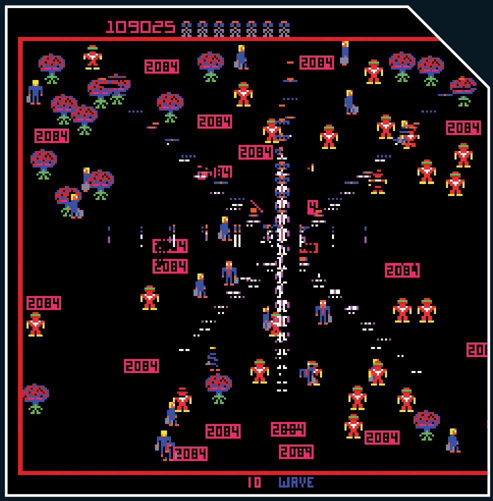
Happily, though, Eugene notes that he thinks the industry is finally over 3D. "They're like, 'You know what? A game doesn't have to be 3D! A game can be a game!' And that's great, because it's impossible to take some formats into 3D. Take *Pac-Man* or *Space Invaders*… or *Robotron* – put them in 3D and they simply don't work."

» The controversially bloody *Smash TV* finally took some of *Robotron*'s original concept ideas to the arcades in 1990.





» [VIC-20] No, you're not hallucinating – the VIC-20 really did receive a *Robotron* conversion. It's not bad either – just don't try running diagonally, unless you want to die.



» As the player re-enters the arena after a nasty death, things already look bad.

enemies stood out. "The beauty of the black background is there's no clutter to distract the player," explains Eugene. "The game's all about the enemies, and the graphics were designed so you can see the contrast, even with dozens of enemies on screen." That said, *Robotron* does make one concession to visual impact, borrowing a trick from *Defender*. "We refined the explosions, separating a character's scanlines – as opposed to *Defender*'s particle explosions. How and where you hit an enemy defines where the lines go, which is very '*Defender*-esque', creating beauty and different patterns of explosions."

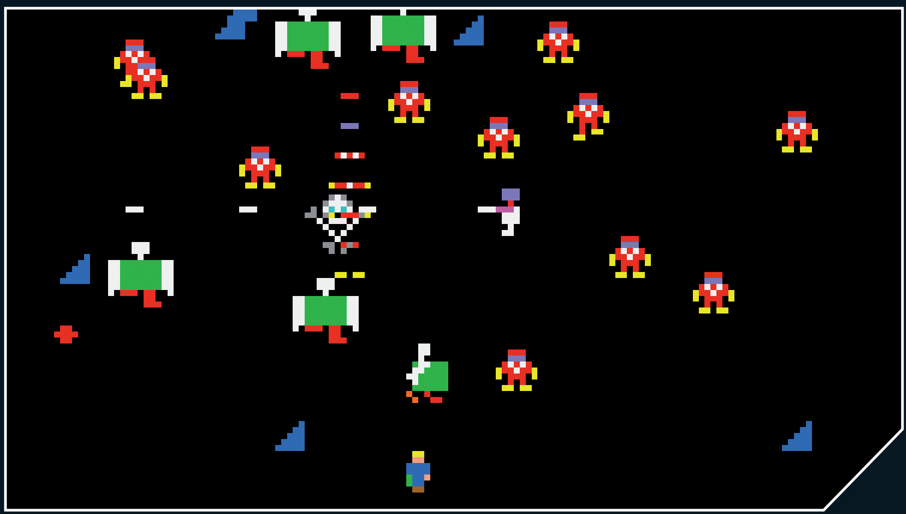
This fine-tuning and attention to detail resulted in a game that feels very complete, but Eugene says he always wanted to make *Robotron* sequels, mostly to implement the game's original vision. This included a world of mazes – a huge underground complex to explore, within which is a mastermind computer to destroy. "I guess *Smash TV* utilised some of those ideas, and with *Robotron*, just the game became fun," considers Eugene. "It's an interesting school of game design – do what you can to get something running, and if that's fun, you're done. Rather than implementing everything from your vision, implement the simplest reduction. If it doesn't correspond to your original vision, who cares?"

Robotron's combination of simplicity and brutal, ferociously relentless action won plenty of fans, and it remains popular today, both in itself and as a source of inspiration for other designers. "I look at *Robotron* like chess – it has simple rules, but every game is different. With a simple universe and set of rules, you allow characters to freely explore them and take things to their limits," muses Eugene. And on the likes of *Geometry Wars*, he's unselfish and open: "It's awesome to see modern designers using the classic 2D *Robotron* format and exploring new play elements and concepts. There's a beauty in the gameplay and it's a viable, fun format."

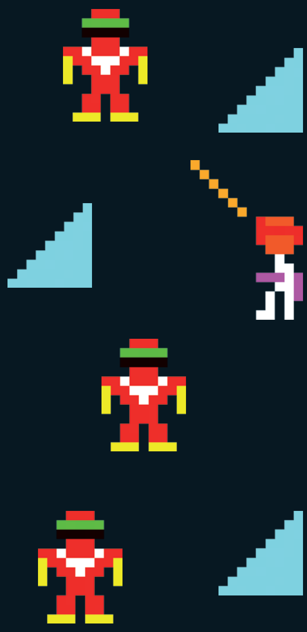
Eugene confirms he's a fan in general of classic formats making a resurgence, and believes such games are beneficial to the industry. "The beauty of the retro-gaming movement is the recognition that the game is an art form and doesn't necessarily get obsolete just because it lacks the latest 3D motion-captured ray-traced graphics." He compares retro with punk-rock – stripping things back to basics. And although you wouldn't want to experience honed-down simplicity for your entire life, there's a purity and timelessness to classic, straightforward gameplay. "With *Robotron*'s gameplay, the beauty is in the limitations – you're stuck on one screen, and that confinement makes the game. If you could walk to somewhere else, it wouldn't be as much fun. You're trapped, and you have to fight," says Eugene. "A game is a reduction of life – being restricted to some little world that has its own rules. And the industry has finally recognised that graphics aren't everything – it's all about the game."



» [GBA] It's the GBA tribute to *Llamatron*, *Llamaboost*, which is like *Robotron* twice removed.



» [Lynx] The tiniest *Robotron* you ever did see, on the Atari Lynx. This version isn't entirely hateful, although the rotational firing controls get old fast.



THE CLASSIC GAME



Picking its first fight back in 1984, *Punch-Out!!* was a comical arcade boxing game about a wireframe pugilist with moss hair who had to battle a cast of boxers who resembled the characters of *Popeye*.

Many fans hold up the NES version of the game to be the pinnacle of the series, owing to the game's memorable introduction of the series' iconic hero Little Mac, but it wasn't until the arrival of the Super Nintendo that the game's creator, Genyo Takeda, finally had the tools to bring his inaugural arcade boxing experience into the home with *Super Punch-Out!!*.



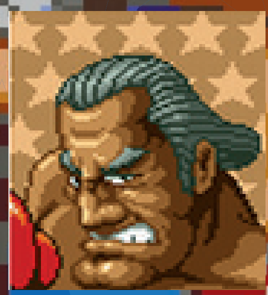
Bald Bull

Bald Bull, the first belt holder you face, is one of three boxers carried over from the NES game. With a head shaped like a jelly and a symmetrical eyebrow-moustachio thing going on, Bald is the most faithful in look and move set to his 8-bit counterpart.



Mr Sandman

Sandman was the final boss in the original arcade game. Here, however, the original Heavyweight Champion of Nintendo Boxing has been relegated to the position of midway boss. It's probably a good thing, too, as he's not as imposing as he once was.



Super Macho Man

Super Macho Man was the last competitor you fought in the *Super Punch-Out!!* arcade game. This grey-ponytail-wearing, bronze-bodied Californian geriatric fights with gold gloves and matching boots. He's a sycophantic poser, too.



Nick Bruiser

This bald and emotionless looking Ivan Drago-looking robot is the final character in the game. Before you get to face Nick though, you have to fight his brother Rick. Nick and Rick look identical except for the fact that Rick smiles and wears ear jewellery.

MEMORABLE MOMEN



WHY IS IT A CLASSIC?



It's got the power!

Split up into three individual circuits and with an impressive roster of 16 fighters for you to challenge, *Super Punch-Out!!* is the biggest game in the *Punch-Out!!* canon. It also boasts some of the slickest two-dimensional graphics ever to be beamed from a Super Nintendo. Consequently, *Super Punch-Out!!* actually feels more like a 16-bit re-imagining of the original coin-op version rather than an out-and-out sequel to the NES game. It also benefits from the power of the SNES to knock out some wonderful-looking cartoon boxers and some pretty flawless animation, too.

THE SUCKER PUNCHES



Breaking the rules

As good as the game may be, it isn't without a few niggles. For one, the popular pint-sized underdog Little Mac, from the NES game, was replaced with a sun-bathing, muscle-pumped Adonis who looked like he'd squandered his prize purses to undergo intense surgery to look like his hero Matt Damon. Nintendo also slightly eschewed the rules of boxing in *Super Punch-Out!!*. Here – as in the original arcade game – fighters get a single round to either knock their opponent out cold or win by TKO. And there's no such thing as a referee's decision. This is the speed dating of boxing.

BEST MOVE



Illegal assaults

Although it's a blatantly illegal move, Dragon Chan's 'leap off the ropes at either end of the ring and kick you square in the face' assault is still a real crowd pleaser. While the speed that Dragon Chan moves at means that you will have little warning that the move is coming, the attack is actually relatively straightforward to avoid. Dragon Chan was actually a carryover from the original *Super Punch-Out!!* – the soft arcade sequel to the original *Punch-Out!!* game. The character's fighting style is quite similar to the NES boxer Don Flamenco, which could be the reason why Chan never found his way on to the NES port.

MEMORABLE OPPONENT



Narcis Prince

This prissy British boxer makes it in for sheer comedy value. Narcis is a blond narcissistic prince (hence his name) who looks like Leonardo DiCaprio in Timmy Mallet's clothes. Don't let his pretty face and curious attire deceive you though, Narcis is a tricky character to fell. The best way is to bop him in his stomach, watch him double over and then punish him with a quick jab to his head. This guy seriously hates taking a blow to the face – smack him in his big, fat, beautiful nose and watch as he does an impression of a melodramatic hypochondriac with a hornet allergy who's just been stung in the eye.

BOX CLEVER



Study your opponents

What really makes the *Punch-Out!!* series stand out from most other fighting games is its incredibly simple and reactive-feeling controls (there are four basic attacks and two special haymaker moves that become available when your stamina bar is full), the acute balance of timing punches and defences, and the notion of reading your opponents as they telegraph their attacks with comical visual cues. You could argue that fights are simply a bunch of elaborate quick-time events, and you might have a point. But we would say that these are the raw workings of boxing re-created brilliantly.

STANDOUT MOMENT



Becoming the best

It takes courage, stamina and skill to become the champion of *Super Punch-Out!!*. Actually, all it takes is a little bit of practice and the capacity to remember things. Anyway, knock the nonchalance out of the current world champion and a sweet victory will be yours to savour. What follows are a series of short press statements from each boxer you've destroyed. Some will opt to take their embarrassing defeats like men, while others, such as Bald Bull and Mr Sandman, will try to goad you back into the ring, and Bear Hugger will reveal to you that it's actually possible to knock him out in just 17 seconds.

What the press said… ages ago

EGM 83%

"The Super NES version is truly a winner. Once you pick up the controller, you won't have any problems at all on the game technique. Fight never-before-seen boxers in past *Punch-Out!!* games. This may not be a realistic boxing game, but it has fantastic gameplay."

What we think

We agree completely. *Super Punch-Out!!* has great gameplay and brilliant controls to boot. But don't sit there comparing it to the NES game – it'll eat away at you. Just see it for what it's trying to be – a spruced-up home port of the original arcade game.



IN THE KNOW

- **PLATFORM:** SNES
- **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- **RELEASED:** 1995
- **GENRE:** SPORTS
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £12

THE MAKING OF...

ZAK McKRACKEN AND THE ALIEN MINDBENDERS



A humorously crafted fable of tabloid journalism, Eastern mysticism, aliens in Groucho Marx disguise glasses and yak poop, Zak McKracken is the cult black sheep of the Lucas adventure family. Mike Bevan talks sushi and stupidity rays with designers David Fox and Matthew Kane

IN THE KNOW



» **PUBLISHER:** LUCASFILM GAMES

» **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE

» **RELEASED:** 1988

» **GENRE:** ADVENTURE

» **GENRE:** C64, AMIGA, ATARI ST, PC, FM TOWNS

» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5+

Pity poor Zak, hapless reporter for *The National Inquisitor*, a tabloid rag so low-brow that most of its readers feed by osmosis. In a pokey two-room apartment in San Francisco, he daydreams of penning a Pulitzer-winning novel, and has nocturnal visions of mysterious symbols, faces on Mars, and a woman he's never met. Which is odd because the only female in Zak's life is his pet goldfish, Sushi, and the only real mystery he's come across recently is the figure on his latest phone bill.

Zak McKracken is a difficult game to pin down, and an even harder one to complete without psychic abilities, mind-bending substances, or a hint sheet. A bewilderingly inventive point-and-click adventure with cosmic and karmic overtones, it was the second SCUMM title released by Lucasfilm Games, following the innovative *Maniac Mansion*. But unlike the compact 'haunted house' environment of its predecessor, *Zak* was a sprawling yarn staged across a variety of enigmatic, far-flung locales, from Stonehenge to the Pyramids, the Peruvian jungle to the foothills of Nepal, and beyond.

And then there's the postbox-bonced aliens, who intend to supplement their overpriced telecom racket with a diabolical scheme to make the entire world stupid. But we digress, and move on to the man behind the stupidity and funny hats, David Fox. One of the first employees hired by the fledgling Lucasfilm Games, David led design on the groundbreaking flight game *Rescue On Fractalus!* (see our Making Of feature in **RG** 44) before moving to the adventure genre with an original game adaptation of Jim Henson's *Labyrinth*. He was involved in a succession of classic-era Lucas adventures, assisting the scripting of *Maniac Mansion*, project-leading *Zak* and co-designing *Indiana Jones And The Last Crusade*. It's a genre he professes to greatly enjoy playing and working in. So where, we wondered, had David first caught the adventure gaming bug?

"My wife, Annie, and I ran the Marin Computer Center in the late Seventies," he replies. "It was non-profit, community access. We'd rent time on our computers for $1.50 per hour, and most people played games on them. So we had a collection of the current ones, including Scott Adams's adventure games." Noticing how popular Scott's titles were, David contacted him to query if he had considered porting the games, which at the time were written exclusively for Tandy's TRS-80 computer, over to other platforms like the Apple II. Scott suggested that David might consider doing it himself. "While converting these games, I was able to take apart what Scott did, maybe even give some feedback if I found any bugs," he explains.

David admits that getting the Lucasfilm gig wasn't exactly a pushover. "From the time I applied for the job until the time I actually got a 'yes' was about two months… two very agonising months. After they called and said I was hired, I was so excited I remember literally jumping up and down around the living room of our home. It wasn't until several hours later that I realised I never asked them what my salary was going to be."

After the experience of designing *Fractalus!* and *Labyrinth*, David found himself at a loose end, awaiting the go-ahead on his next



The National Inquisitor

MARCH 29, 1997

HOLY MEN SEEK GOD ON THE GOLF COU

Brain-Boggling Beings Crossing Everyone's Wires

Stupidity Epidemic Linked To Phone Company Space Aliens!

See Page 2

Furry Freak In

Two-Headed Attacks Two Campers At Once!

ALIEN AMUSEMENT

» *The National Inquirer* newspaper, which shipped with the original big-box versions of the game.







» Skywalker Ranch: not a bad place to spend a hard day's coding, eh folks?

» [C64] Zak's bedroom comes complete with badly fitted carpet and pet goldfish.



BETWEEN TIME AND SPACE

Zak's ongoing cult status has surprised even its creators – David receives more fan mail about the game than all his other Lucasfilm titles put together. An indicator of its popularity is the number of fan-project 'sequels' that have been in development. The first completed was Lucasfan Games' *New Adventures Of Zak McKracken*, which continued the story where the first game left off. Other projects include *Zak McKracken And The Alien Rockstars* and *Zak McKracken And The Lonely Sea Monster*. By far the most ambitious of the fan sequels, *Zak McKracken: Between Time And Space*, was released in 2008, following a pilgrimage by one of its creators to California to meet with David and Matthew. The game is German language only, but plans are afoot for an English translation – see **www.zak2.org**.

Obviously, there's something about *Zak* that keeps people playing in its uniquely askew game universe. "The underlying message of *Zak* is bigger, deeper, more optimistic, and less limiting than other games," reckons Chris Tolworthy, creator of the Zak McKracken Archive (**www.zaksite.com**). "It packs in amazing ideas, visits other planets, is non-violent and about challenging stupidity, and it makes inspirational, educational stuff genuinely fun. Trippy, man."

game, which he hoped would embrace a more personal theme than anything he'd done so far. "Ron Gilbert (co-designer and chief architect of SCUMM) knew I was between projects," says David. "He asked if I could do some of the scripting for *Maniac Mansion*, and thought it wouldn't take long – maybe a month or so. It sounded like a lot of fun, so I jumped in. It actually ended up taking quite a bit longer, but I was having a blast writing scripts, programming a good chunk of the gameplay, and learning a new way to design and implement adventure games in the process."

It was a natural progression to use Ron's pioneering SCUMM engine for David's new project, a melting pot of his own philosophies and interests. "I wanted to do a 'New Age' themed game," he explains, "a strong interest of mine for as long as I can remember – as a kid, I loved science fiction, the supernatural, and UFOs. But I wanted to find a way to take all that and present it in a game that also was uplifting, fun, funny, and might make a difference in people's lives in some small way." David's first concept along these lines was *Ancient Astronauts*, a game which would have featured the same mystical themes and many of the locations of *Zak*, although less of the delightfully surreal humour we know today.

"It was a comedy from day one," asserts David. "What changed was the degree and type of humour. Ron was instrumental here. After reading the first pass of the design doc, where the humour was more subtle, he felt the game had to be wackier in order to work. We had a brainstorming session with all the other designers, led by Steve Arnold, our general manager. Among other things, the main character's name changed from 'Jason' to 'Zak McKracken' (by combining names found in a Marin County phone book), and Zak got moved from a mainstream newspaper to a tabloid. That gave us much more licence to throw in crazy stuff, like Elvis in a spaceship." The rock music connection continued with the 'Alien Mindbenders' of the title – inspired by Bowie's *Ziggy Stardust And The Spiders From Mars*.

"I wanted to make the game take place on a global... er, multi-global scale," David declares. "I think one of the reasons Ron had *Maniac Mansion* take place in a single location was to get away from artificial constraints of 'you can't go there' showing up all the time. Being self-contained in a single building that made a lot of sense. I wanted to open it up."

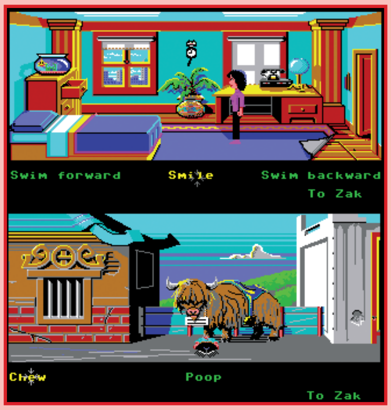
David came up with a unique solution, providing a sense of point-and-click global freedom with diverse locations connected by 'international flights', the cost of which were debited from an in-game 'cash-card'. "We had to come up with other ways to constrain the gameplay without it feeling like you couldn't do what you wanted to do," he divulges. "In truth, if you were to lay out all the 'nodes' in both games, I don't think *Zak* was a lot bigger, especially if you don't count all the 'pseudo-rooms'



ZAK MCKRACKEN AND THE ALIEN MINDBENDERS

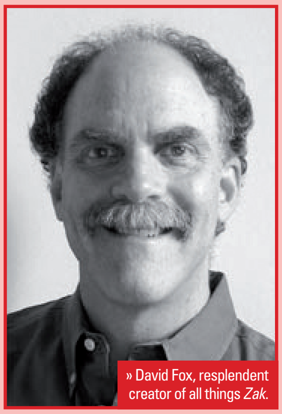
IF WE COULD TALK TO THE ANIMALS

One of the more humorously wacky concepts in *Zak McKracken* is the ability to mind-meld with various creatures, great and small. Having said that, transferring your consciousness over to Zak's pet goldfish and a Nepalese Yak aren't exactly the most action-packed experiences you'll ever have in adventure gaming, as these screenshots testify. Chew, chew…





» *Zak McKracken*'s fabulous cover artwork was designed by future *Sam & Max* creator Steve Purcell.



» David Fox, resplendent creator of all things *Zak*.





» [C64] At the pawn shop, the big red sign with the arrow is quite important.



» [Amiga] Look beside you… a two-headed squirrel!

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

RESCUE ON FRACTALUS!
SYSTEM: ATARI 8-BIT
YEAR: 1984

MANIAC MANSION
SYSTEM: DOS
YEAR: 1987

THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: AMIGA 500
YEAR: 1990

DAY OF THE TENTACLE
SYSTEM: DOS
YEAR: 1993



we used to make up the mazes in the game." Ah… mazes. One of *Zak*'s most oft-criticised features, along with several perplexingly obscure puzzle solutions, and the ability to run down your cash-card too quickly on air fares (until you figured out how to win the in-game lottery). Sure, *Zak* wasn't perfect, but you'd get a lot further with an original copy of the game, with its clue-packed *Inquisitor* newspaper.

Around this time, Lucasfilm Games had moved from premises in San Raphael into George Lucas's salubrious Skywalker Ranch. "I loved working at the Ranch," David confesses. "When we weren't crunching on a project, we could take long walks, go on bike rides, eat great meals, sit on a couch in front of the fireplace… But when I was crunching, I could have been locked in a closet somewhere – at those times I hardly noticed where I was."

And of course, it wouldn't have been right being part of the Lucas Empire without indulging a little *Star Wars* 'techie' humour. "When the Games Group first started," says David, "everyone had a dumb CRT terminal on their desks, and these were tied into one of several VAX minicomputers. They were all named after *Star Wars* planets. We named ours 'Kessel' after the line in the first film where Han Solo claimed he did the Kessel run 'in less than 12 parsecs'. We figured that since there was something fun and illicit about Kessel (known to be a prison planet and home to one of the galaxy's largest spice-mining operations), that seemed to match our own irreverence and fun-loving spirit.



Later, we got Sun Microsystem workstations running Unix. We did our coding there, and that's also where the SCUMM compiler lived. We were able to download the code directly to the C64's hard disk for *Maniac Mansion* and *Zak*. By the time we did *Last Crusade*, PCs were powerful enough where we could develop on the same computer we were targeting."

The original C64 version features a great soundtrack composed by co-designer Matthew Kane. "I'm not sure where the inspiration for the main theme came from," says Matthew, "but many of the other bits were inspired by (or stolen from) popular and classical music. The airport music was a mash-up of John Denver's *Leaving On A Jet Plane* and Brian Eno's *Music For Airports*. And the music on Mars is a twisted version of 'Mars' from *The Planets*. I had to input the *Zak* music through a clunky C64 note-editor. The original theme recording [available at http://lamaweb.com/zak] was made with real synthesizers, but recreating that on the Commodore was quite a challenge."

Ron Gilbert served as the unofficial third member of the *Zak* development team, continuously improving the SCUMM interpreter as the game was being written. The flexibility and user-friendliness of Ron's scripting tool allowed the two designers to concentrate on narrative struggles rather than coding ones. "David and I wrote all the original SCUMM code, which I still believe is the most expressive programming language I've ever worked in,"



GIRLS FROM MARS

Zak McKracken is notable for its trio of strong female characters, which players control later in the game alongside Zak, using a character switching system similar to *Maniac Mansion*. "It was fun to develop so many personalities," says Matthew. "We were able to create puzzles requiring more than one character to complete that would have been impossible (or impossibly tedious) with just one."

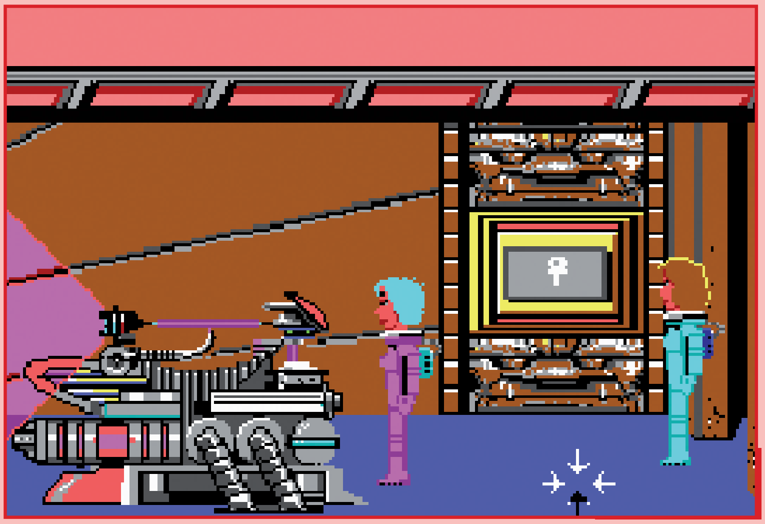
Famously, each of the girls in the game were based on the significant others of the programmers. David's wife Annie gave her name to Zak's dream-girl and founder of the Society for Ancient Wisdom (the surname Larris being her real maiden name). Co-ed Martian explorers Leslie Bennett and Melissa China were based on the then girlfriends of Matthew Kane (play-tester Leslie Edwards, who's listed in the game's credits) and Ron Gilbert. "Melissa was studying Chinese, could speak fluently, and spent time travelling in China," reveals David. "The only person who would know about her is Ron. I think they broke up before the game hit the shelves, though."



Leslie appears to change her hair colour every time she removes her astronaut's helmet in the game. The 'real' Leslie (above) admits to "dying my hair a different colour practically every week."



» Can Zak stop the diabolical Caponians and their machine? Or should you go play *Rescue On Fractalus!*?



acknowledges Matthew. "In some ways it was more like writing a movie script than a computer program. My girlfriend at the time [Leslie, one of the girls on Mars] knew nothing about programming, but she would read printouts of the code and laugh at the jokes."

"It was much easier to use than anything we had before," David concurs. "I really liked the pseudo-English commands we could use to make things happen in *Zak*, it felt almost like we were writing a movie and the engine would just do what we wanted, unlike *Labyrinth* was much more about hand-coding."

Zak's final sales might have paled next to the enormously successful *Indiana Jones And The Last Crusade*, but it remains David's favourite of the graphic adventures he worked on at Lucasfilm. "That's because it was the only one where I had complete control of the plot, jokes, and everything that went in," he admits, "and its story was so close to what I was interested in." The C64 version was followed by enhanced ports, with higher resolution backgrounds and characters, for the Amiga, Atari ST and PC. Best of all was the Japanese 256-colour FM Towns version, with its CD-quality soundtrack and hilariously inappropriate anime-style cover artwork.

Curiously the game appears to have been far more popular with European audiences than American, with German adventure-fans particularly embracing the title. In fact, it has developed quite a cult-following this side of the pond, with a number of lovingly produced 'fan sequels' (like the recent *Zak McKracken: Between Time And Space*) and the excellent zaksite.com web archive originating from Old World shores. David admits to being flattered by the enduring interest in his transcendental tabloid odyssey. As for his creation's avid European reception back in the day, he has a few guru-like theories of his own.

"WE WROTE ALL THE ORIGINAL SCUMM CODE, WHICH I IS THE MOST EXPRESSIVE PROGRAMMING LANGUAGE I'VE EVER WORKED IN" MATTHEW ON ZAK'S CODING

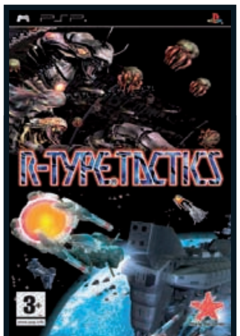
"Maybe it's because our chief competitor was Sierra, and they didn't have much of a presence in Europe," he reflects. "So without their competition, our games got a lot more exposure. We also took great pains to make sure our translations were done right – that they kept the original humour, were translated by a native-speaker, and the quality was as high as the original English version. Or maybe my sense of humour just matches better with Europe…"

Or maybe not. **Retro Gamer** seems to recall an early episode of *Futurama* where a bunch of brainy aliens try to enslave Earth by making the whole planet stupid, and a rather familiar gag featuring a female newsreader repeating herself ad infinitum as the effects take hold. We wonder if the writers were *Zak* fans…



SOMETHING OLD SOMETHING NEW

RETRO GAMER LOOKS AT CLASSIC FRANCHISES THAT ARE BEING REVIVED FOR NEXT-GENERATION SYSTEMS. THIS MONTH WE LOOK AT AN R-TYPE REVIVAL, R-TYPE TACTICS



Game Title: R-Type Tactics
System: PSP
Interviewee: Kazuma Kujo – producer, Irem Software Engineering Inc.

■ *R-Type Tactics* marks a new different direction for the series; what was the reasoning behind this and why did you decide to create it on the PSP?
We finished *R-Type* in terms of a shoot-'em-up with *R-Type Final*. We actually think of *R-Type Tactics* not as an extension or sequel, but as taking the franchise in a new direction. We tried to develop a new game that would allow the player to enjoy grand space battles using the many ships we created for *R-Type Final*. We then started thinking of an infrastructure that would expand the mechanic design and the setting of *R-Type*. This was really the start of *R-Type Tactics*. The reason we chose to develop this game on PSP was because of its mobility and its high graphic quality, to allow a battle between friends without conditions.

■ What can fans of the series expect to see from this new game?
We hope all the fans will enjoy a new style of battle between the humans and the Bydo, which really differs from the shoot-'em-ups. Fans can also expect to see a strong colour of *R-Type* running through the game and a combat style that feels more simulation in its approach.

■ Were you ever concerned that gamers would find it difficult to adjust to this new approach to the franchise?
Yes, of course. I'm sure that most of fans expect that *R-Type* should remain a shoot-'em-up, but we dared to try to propose this with this game. This is the one of our biggest challenges when trying to expand the possibility and appeal of the franchise.

■ What's been the reception and feedback you've seen from those *R-Type* fans that have played the game?
Most of them are sympathetic to our aim, and agree that this is still *R-Type*, even after becoming simulation.

■ What are you most proud of about *R-Type Tactics*?
This is a full-dress simulation game. And even though the style of play differs from what fans have played before, there's no doubt that they will still view this as very much an *R-Type* game. Both the Force and the other *R-Type* specialities all feature in the game.

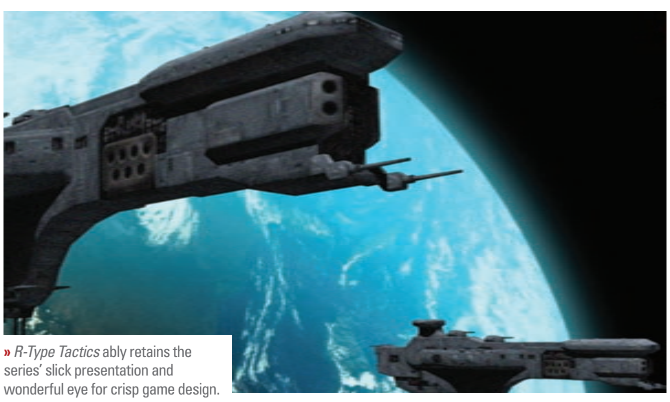
■ Were there any particular problems you faced during the game's development?
We weren't able to make up our mind as to how much of the original rules of *R-Type* we should leave in. Finally, we settled on it being a simulation game and moved forward with that thought. As a result, we think the game succeeded in finding a good balance.

■ Did you have any ideas that never made the final cut?
Yes, the rule that you could build and level up your own bases, and also the rule that you can tame and upgrade the Bydo forces. We would like to include these ideas into the next game if we have the chance.

■ How would you like *R-Type Tactics* to be remembered by gamers?
Rather than simply a spin-off or another story, we expect them to remember *R-Type Tactics* as the game which reinterpreted the *R-Type* world.

■ Can you give us any information at all about the new *R-Type* game that's rumoured to be making an appearance on Xbox Live?
It's not going to be a new game but actually a new version of the conventional *R-Type*, though some new modes are going to be added. You can enjoy the first *R-Type* and *R-Type II* in HD with the benefit of additional graphics and new play modes.





» *R-Type Tactics* ably retains the series' slick presentation and wonderful eye for crisp game design.



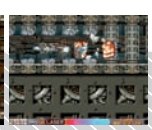


» Thankfully, *R-Type Tactics* doesn't scrimp on the boss battles – which look as impressive as they've always been.

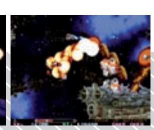
R-Type Timeline


R-TYPE
Year Released: 1987
Version: Arcade


R-TYPE II
Year Released: 1989
Version: Arcade

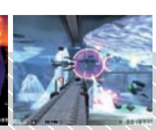

ARMED POLICE UNIT GALLOP
Year Released: 1991
Version: Arcade

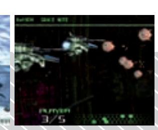

SUPER R-TYPE
Year Released: 1991
Version: SNES


R-TYPE LEO
Year Released: 1992
Version: Arcade


R-TYPE III: THE THIRD LIGHTNING
Year Released: 1993
Version: SNES


R-TYPE DELTA
Year Released: 1999
Version: PSone


R-TYPE FINAL
Year Released: 2003
Version: PS2


R-TYPE TACTICS
Year Released: 2008
Version: PSP

BOSS/RUSH

WHERE WE SQUARE OFF AGAINST THAT END-OF-LEVEL BADDIE FROM YESTERYEAR...

M BISON



GAME INFO



- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** ARCADE
- » **RELEASED:** 1990
- » **PUBLISHER:** CAPCOM
- » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE

Such was the brilliance of Capcom's seminal fighting game that it helped to spearhead a renewed interest in coin-op machines and ensure that Nintendo's sophomore console hit the ground running.

Full of memorable and iconic characters, each of the original eight World Warriors quickly became overnight celebrities. Each fighter was wonderfully crafted, felt original, was brilliantly fleshed out and looked timeless. With all that in mind, Capcom knew it would need an antagonist powerful enough to stand up to its posse of iconic pugilists – one that would demand both the respect and fear of gamers, while feeling an equal to the fighters themselves. Step forward M Bison; a red-suited patriarch of a crime syndicate known as Shadaloo, and a despot with enough muscle to back his nefarious ambitions.

M Bison's first videogame appearance was in the arcade game *Street Fighter II: The World Warrior*, although many gamer's first exposure to the villainous tyrant would be courtesy of their Super Nintendo. Once the player had beaten Bison's three minions – Balrog, Vega and Sagat – they were whisked to the streets of Thailand where they would then face their final opponent. Appearing in a smart crimson military suit, metal armlets, shin guards and a dark-grey cape, M Bison's stern and official-like presence certainly cut a threatening pose. And the cleverly understated look of the character helped give the game's finale a sense of grandeur.

After tossing his cloak to the floor, Bison launches his attack as quickly as you realise he has the strength, speed and clinical precision to cause your stress level to spill out from your ears. His Scissor Kick, Head Stomp attack and Psycho Power meant he could smother a fighter from seemingly any angle. And his devastating Psycho Crusher attack, which turned him into a spinning ball of concentrated psychokinetic energy, forced players to fight with caution as Bison seemingly revelled in catching fighters off guard and administering a punishment by way of taking a considerable chunk of your energy bar away.

After being on the business end of a nasty Shun Goku Satsu – courtesy of Akuma – M Bison was later left to lick his wounds following the events of *Street Fighter II*. As a result, *Street Fighter III* would mark the first time that M Bison would retire from the role of end boss, replaced by the dual-toned leotard-wearing cult leader, Gill.

Bison has since appeared as main antagonist in every *Street Fighter II* game, including the retroactive *Alpha* series, which fleshed out the nefarious overlord, and chronicled his connection with the female character, Rose. It's a story arc that explains how Bison went from being the chubby, white-eyed demonic madman he's depicted in the *Alpha* canon, to the trim, slightly downgraded humanised character we later see him become in the *Street Fighter II* coin-op. If you notice, this leaner look to Bison has stayed with the character since, throughout the *SNK Vs Capcom* games right up to the release of *Street Fighter IV*. M Bison's power might have waned slightly throughout the series, but he still remains one of the most feared adversaries inside the beat-'em-up genre.



» The *Alpha* series saw Bison take on a chubbier and more powerful form as seen in the successful animated movie. It was also the first game where Bison could be seen to have creepy white pupils.



» Two of the most iconic beat-'em-up villains finally got to battle courtesy of the popular SNK and Capcom mashup series, which kept Bison's slim physique.

M BISON; A RED-SUITED PATRIARCH OF THE CRIME SYNDICATE KNOWN AS SHADALOO, AND A DESPOT WITH ENOUGH MUSCLE TO BACK HIS NEFARIOUS AMBITIONS



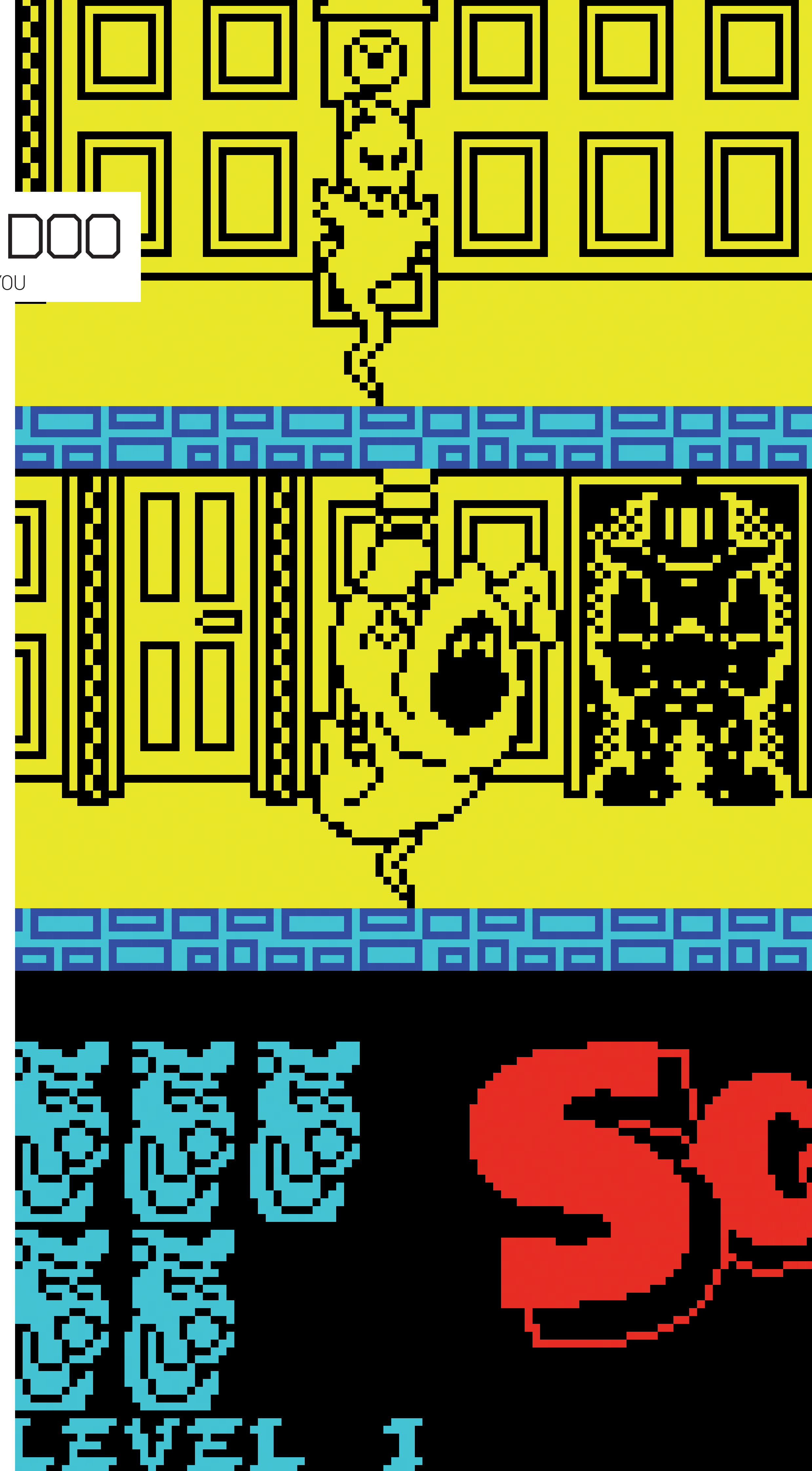
» M Bison's iconic Psycho Crusher is powerful, but slow, and is actually easily parried with a projectile.



» Bison's Scissor Kick can be devastating, particularly when he strings two of the kicks together.



» The Head Stomp is a two-pronged attack. Press a punch button after performing the Head Stomp and get a cheap extra hit in.

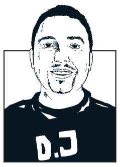


SCOOBY DOO

SCOOBY DOOBY DOO, I HATE YOU



- » **PUBLISHER:** ELITE
- » **RELEASED:** 1986
- » **GENRE:** PLATFORMER
- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** ZX SPECTRUM
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £1+



HISTORY

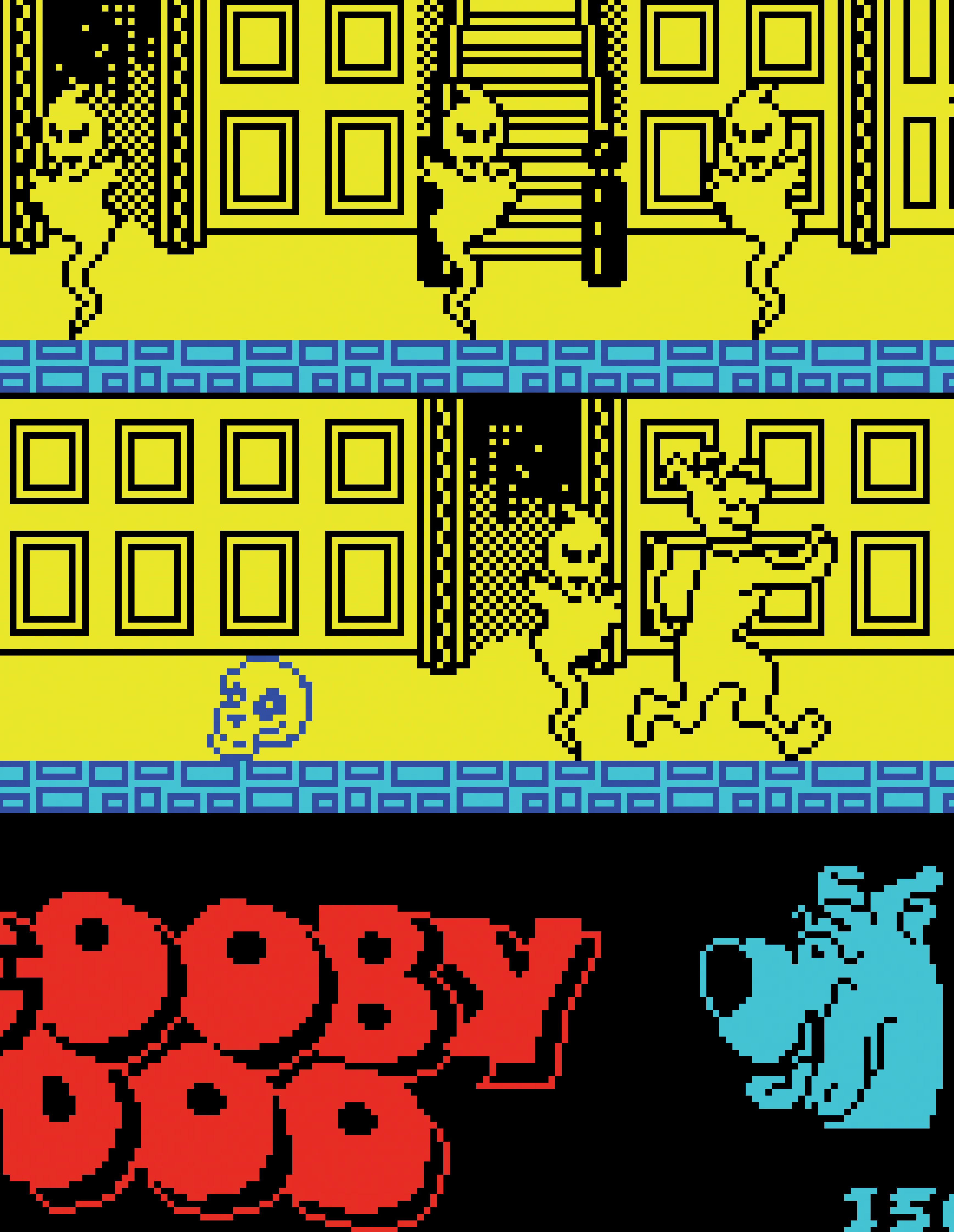
My three-year-old currently has an unhealthy fixation with Hanna Barbara's 30-year-old mutt. In between endless reruns of the various cartoon shows on Boomerang and countless replays of *Scooby-Doo 2: Monsters Unleashed* – which does start to worryingly grow on you – I soon found myself reminiscing over the Scoobster's first outing on the ZX Spectrum.

First released in 1986 after an insane promotion campaign that was promising *Dragon's Lair*-like graphics and clever gameplay mechanics, *Scooby Doo*'s flimsy plot could have come straight out of the cartoon.

Arriving at a dark and mysterious castle, Fred, Daphne, Velma and the Shagster immediately get kidnapped, leaving the petrified mutt to save his four friends. Using only his fists for defence, the Scoobster has to jab, thump and punch his way through the ridiculous parade of ghosts that harass him endlessly, giving him just a few precious moments to scramble up ladders or snack on the occasional Scooby Snack. A huge disappointment – for me at least – on its release, especially if you had been following its lengthy production and the grand promises that were being made – like I had been – *Scooby Doo* did have one thing in its favour: it looked absolutely sensational.

Accurately mimicking the hound's on-screen persona, the sprite design throughout was excellent, with Scooby and his enemies being meticulously drawn. Indeed, I'm still impressed by the look of panic on the mutt's face when he runs away from ghosts, or his genuine look of pain when he runs straight into a wall.

For all the splendid graphics and animation, *Scooby Doo* was a real bitch to play; with developer Gargoyle Games feeling that flinging a never-ending supply of ghosts at you so you could barely move without dying was a good thing. It wasn't, and while I'd always find myself drawn back to those amazingly slick visuals, the mind-numbing gameplay quickly sent me running. Little wonder that it was another nine years before someone else was brave enough to release a game based on the iconic doggy.







A SHOCK TO THE SYSTEM

A DECADE AFTER ITS RELEASE AND YOU'LL STILL HEAR PC GAMERS RANTING ABOUT IT. BEN BIGGS EXPLAINS WHY SYSTEM SHOCK 2 HAS MADE SUCH A HUGE IMPACT ON THE GAMES INDUSTRY



Picking a single game from a huge back catalogue of titles that stretches so far that it could probably be seen from space isn't easy. *System Shock 2* is one of dozens of high-profile retail PC games from the last 30 years that challenged gaming conventions and came away smelling of roses. For every one that tried and managed that trick successfully, there are another 50 that, at best, faded into obscurity and, at worst, were hauled across the critical coals and lambasted for their crimes against the average gamer's expectations. Not that we want to detract from the importance of this sequel to PC gaming, but timing and a large degree of luck had a hand in *SS2* becoming the game we fondly reminisce about today, whenever we play one of the many new titles that have used the technologies, concepts or the talented staff who worked on the Eidos classic, as a springboard.

The game that spawned this pivotal sequel, *System Shock*, was developed by Looking Glass Studios and published by Origin Systems in 1994, headed by *Ultima* progenitor Richard Garriot. It was released at the tail end of a financial year overshadowed by *Wings Of Glory* and *Ultima VIII: Pagan*, so Origin was hardly pinning the hopes for its fiscal future on this new IP. Besides that, the relatively inexperienced Looking Glass Studios' previous title, *Ultima Underworld II: Labyrinth Of Worlds*, was a long way from the sci-fi vision of *System Shock* in more than genre alone. But the team had a few aces up its sleeve.

System Shock was the *Half-Life 2* of its time in many ways, advancing and introducing technologies where others were happy to rest on their laurels. It used an enhanced version of the Underworld Engine, allowing the player freedom to move in a true three-dimensional environment, with high-resolution textures and the ability to mouse-look in any direction; this was revolutionary, when the first-person games of its time coupled a limited 2D plane of movement with a rudimentary camera bob, a barrier to immersion by comparison. Programmer Seamus Blackley developed the advanced physics for the engine that gave many interactive objects mass and velocity, lending tangibility to physical impact and wall climbing. He also implemented the ubiquitous FPS lean, which he used again for shooting around corners in *Jurassic Park: Trespasser*.

More significantly, *System Shock* had been endowed with a free-moving cursor mode that gave the player HUD interaction and an inventory similar in concept to point-and-click adventure games. A talented visionary indeed – at least Microsoft thought so, and the company was proved right when it poached him to work on DirectX, and Seamus went on to co-write the initial proposal for the Xbox.

The FPS/RPG hybrid went down well with the critics: *PC Gamer*, *Games Domain* and *Next Generation Magazine* all awarded it upwards of 90%. But, unfortunately, the new IP wasn't just unfamiliar ground to PC gamers, *System Shock* was competing with Romero's killer app and managed sales of around 170,000 – which in no way reflected its quality. Gamespy recently concluded its 2007 Hall Of Fame retrospective by saying, "The best computer game of 1994 came and went while everyone was busy killing each other in *Doom II*." A fair observation, but then being upstaged by one of the best shooters in history is surely nothing to be ashamed of?

A SHOCK TO THE SYSTEM

We're loath to place the blame squarely on the shoulders of the product when questionable marketing also had a hand in *System Shock*'s relatively low sales. In the rush to make the end of the 1993/1994 financial year deadline, the standard 3.5-inch floppy disk version was released on the 26 March launch day with a second, CD-ROM Enhanced version only appearing a few months later. With a little extra time, Looking Glass Studios made good use of the comparatively enormous capacity of CD-ROM technology and brought unparalleled immersion in the form of an eye-bleeding 640x480 SVGA mode and full spoken speech, transforming a tame end-level SHODAN-boss into an omnipresent, dysfunctional, megalomaniac uber-computer with a terrifying electronic voice modulation that set your hair on end whenever it spoke. Unfortunately the inferior (albeit, still excellent) 3.5 floppy version by then had several months of exposure and was naturally the one to make the indelible impression on consumers. Luminary Warren Spector worked on *System Shock* as producer, and in an interview with Gamespy he admitted that releasing the floppy version early was probably a flawed idea. "The additional audio added so much it might as well have been a different game. The CD version seemed so much more… well, modern. And the perception of *Shock* was cemented in the press and in people's minds by the floppy version – the silent movie version! I really think that cost us sales."

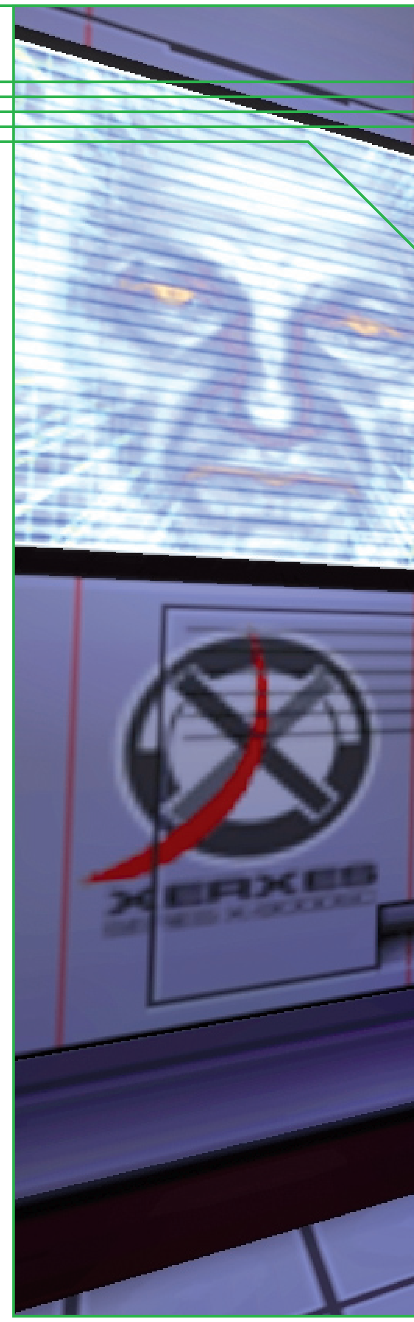
The *System Shock* IP was far from abandoned, though. Several years passed and in 1997 three key people left Looking Glass Studios, ironically marking the beginning of a transient, yet incredibly productive and successful period for the developer. Ken Levine, Jonathan Chey and Robert Fermier formed what turned out to be a diverse hit machine: Irrational Games. Looking Glass Studios was a year away from releasing another convention-busting title, *Thief: The Dark Project*, so Irrational's first task was to pick up where Looking Glass had left off. And having sewn up a tight gameplay concept that brought the inventory system, personal log-driven plot and other elements at the core of the original, *System Shock* IP-owner Electronic Arts was keen to sign Irrational up and give them the licence to work with. "*Shock* is definitely one of our favourite games of all time," *SS2*'s producer Josh Randall told IGN. "Judging from the response we have been getting on the web, we are not alone… people are always mentioning *System Shock* as an influence. I think everyone at Looking Glass has wanted to do a sequel to *Shock* since we did the original."



» Looking Glass's 1994 original *System Shock* game menu, in all its VGA glory.

Sure enough, Irrational wasn't braving this ambitious debut alone. Co-developing *SS2* was Irrational's progenitor Looking Glass Studios, who provided its new Dark Engine technology to drive the game. Looking Glass must have had some faith in Irrational to make *SS2* a success, as this was the same game engine behind its new *Thief* IP, and it was an ambitious technology at that – albeit unfinished. "To make up for the short development cycle and correspondingly small budget, the project was supposed to reuse technology," Jonathan Chey told Gamasutra in his *SS2* postmortem. "Not technology in the sense of a standalone engine from another game, but individual components that were spun off from yet another game, *Thief: The Dark Project*. The *Thief* technology was still under development and months away from completion when our team started working with it… The Dark Engine was never delivered to the *System Shock* team as a finished piece of code." The unrefined engine and unusual development situation wasn't without its tribulations, of course, but sharing the code had its pros as well as cons. "We had direct access to the ongoing bug-fixes and engine enhancements flowing from the *Thief* team. It exposed us to bugs that the *Thief* team introduced, but it also gave us the ability to fix bugs and add new features to the engine. Because we had this power, we were sometimes expected to fix engine problems ourselves rather than turning them over to Looking Glass programmers… But being able to tamper with the engine allowed us to change it to support *System Shock*-specific features in ways that a general engine never could."

Despite the piecemeal tech, the Dark Engine became a crucial factor in *SS2*'s success partly due to the advanced AI and the



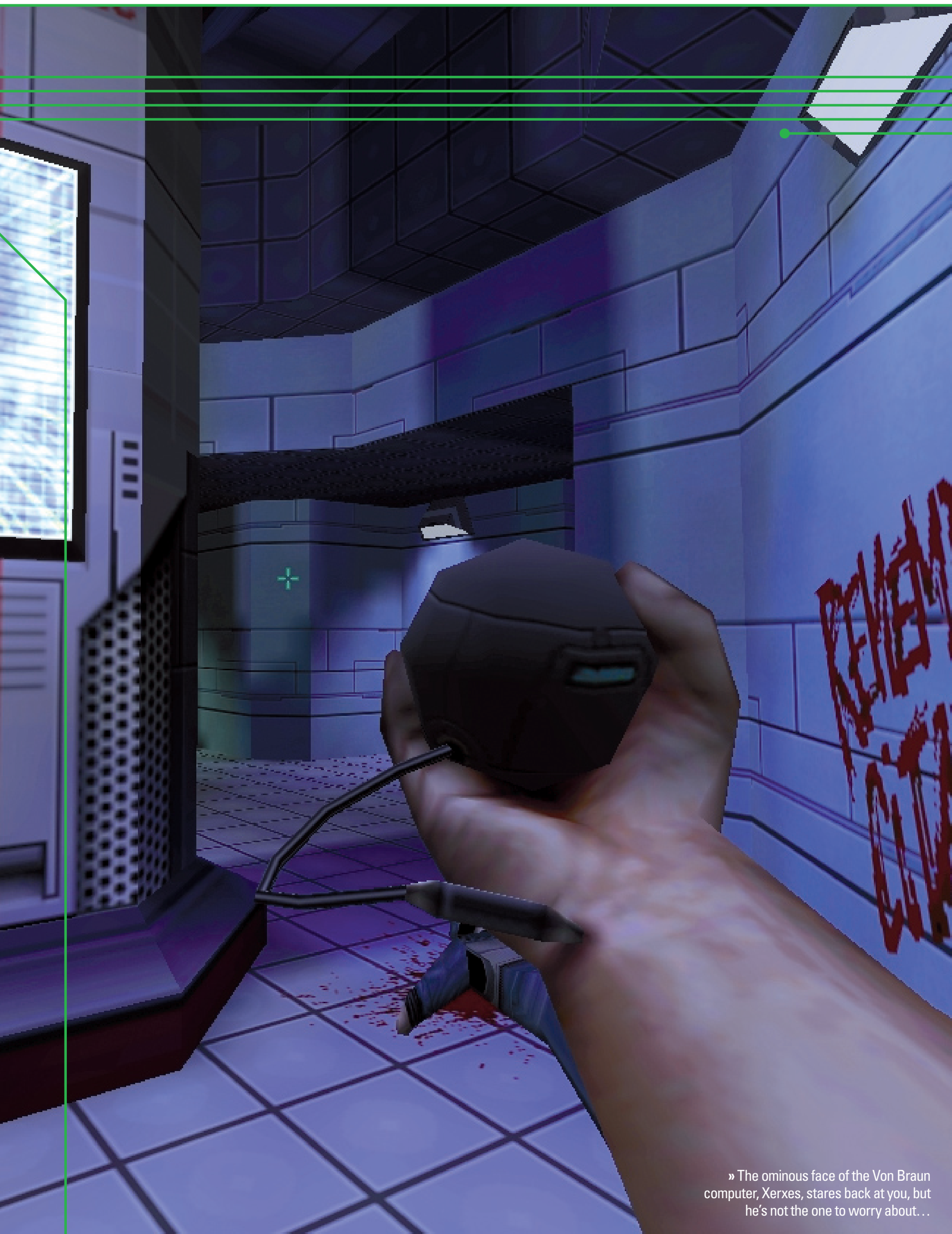


WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Though both Looking Glass Studios and Irrational Games were hardly inexperienced when they teamed up in 1999, both made a name for themselves by being involved in the creation of *SS2*. While Harvey Smith, Seamus Blackley and Warren Spector didn't work directly on *SS2*, they were all involved in the original game and have since made big names for themselves in the games industry. Ken Levine has gone from *SS2*'s lead designer to project director on *BioShock*, though he isn't working on *BioShock 2* as a part of the new 2K studio. Project manager Jonathan Chey headed Irrational Canberra and also saw Irrational working with seven different publishers until its acquisition by 2K Games, to form its Boston, Canberra and the new Californian studio, 2K Marin. Rob Fermier had a hand in forming Irrational but remained with Looking Glass through to *Thief II*, before the company folded. He joined Eidos to work on *Deus Ex* before working for Microsoft on a number of PC titles, including two *Age Of Empires* games and *Master Of Orion III*. Other notable Looking Glass and Irrational staff who cut their teeth on *SS2* include audio director Eric Brosius and wife Terri Brosius (the voice of SHODAN), who worked on the music with Harmonix for *Guitar Hero*, and game designer Paul Neurath, who has since worked on *Arx Fatalis* and the first expansion for *Neverwinter Nights*.



» *SS2* item research often had a chemical requirement. *BioShock* ditched this idea for the photograph mechanic.



» The ominous face of the Von Braun computer, Xerxes, stares back at you, but he's not the one to worry about…



» Hybrids are human hosts controlled and linked to the Many by an annelid parasite.



"Nothing applied as much imagination to sound as SS2"

SS2's sound was certainly fresh

engine's use of sound. Levine and company took a great deal away with them from their experiences with *System Shock*, and sound was once again to prove vital to immersing the player on board the Von Braun. Irrational veered away from using arbitrary noises for many of its humanoid baddies, so Hybrids, Cyborgs and Cyborg Midwives each had a distinct repertoire to dip into. In reference to the hive mind of their annelid parasites, Hybrids would mumble, "Your song is not ours" and, "Silence the discord," while malfunctioning Cyborgs and Cyborg Midwives politely greeted you or randomly commented on how "they grow up so fast," respectively, even as they set their targets on you. Flies, spiders, mechanoids and other nasties were bereft of any vocabulary, but the sounds they made propagated in exactly the same way, so the whine of an activating turret, sliding door or the mantra of an enemy could be softly heard some distance away and through several walls, increasing in volume the closer you were to the source. "We needed to implement a sound system significantly more sophisticated than many other games," said *Dark Project*'s lead programmer Tom Leonard about the Dark Engine, in his *Dark Project* Gamasutra postmortem. "When constructing a *Thief* mission, designers built a secondary 'room database' that reflected the connectivity of spaces at a higher level than raw geometry. Although this was also used for script triggers and AI optimisations, the primary role of the room database was to provide a representation of the world simple enough to allow realistic real-time propagation of sounds through the spaces. Without this, it is unlikely the sound design could have succeeded, as it allowed the player and the AIs to perceive sounds more as they are in real life and better grasp the location of their opponents in the mission spaces."

Up until this point sound had been used effectively to create atmosphere in first-person games, but nothing applied as much imagination to the medium as *SS2*. A small revolution in sound technology was developing in the industry with the stereo sound card as a PC standard rapidly being replaced by quadraphonic, then 5.1 channel audio. Manufacturers like Creative Labs were leading the race with its enduring Sound Blaster Live! series, the original EAX-enhanced board and naturally, environmental audio was made available as a tick-box menu option in both *SS2* and *Thief*. These games were way ahead of the competition and still hold their own today in that respect, but EAX was just the veneer on the groundwork that Looking Glass and Irrational had put in.

SS2 also implemented sound in a more intelligent manner with the Dark Engine giving enemy AI three distinct states. The first was a vague awareness of the presence of the player either by a fleeting glimpse or a noise you had made. The second would be some kind of affirmation: a definite sighting or a noise that would prompt a full alert and cause the enemy to seek you out, moving in your general direction. Finally, a point-blank sighting would result in a direct attack.

THE WEAPONS OF SYSTEM SHOCK 2

Wrench
Ammo is in short supply, so when all else fails, a smack in the face from this should suffice... several hundred times.



Shotgun
FPS standard issue shottie. Takes shotgun slugs and pellets for squishier foes. Hasn't got the satisfying punch and recoil of *Doom*, but does the job.



Argon-Suspension Laser Pistol
A weak weapon against all enemy types, but with a huge magazine, no recoil and fast firing time. Very useful when short on ammo.



Assault Rifle
Has an automatic mode but with armour-piercing, anti-personnel and standard rounds in short supply, you'll usually stick to normal.



Stasis Field Generator
Doesn't harm an enemy, but depending on your exotic weapons skill, can freeze them in place for a long time.



Dual-Circuit EMP Rifle
Shoots EMP (electro-magnetic pulse) blasts,which are, unfortunately, completely ineffective against organics, but lethal to electronic baddies.



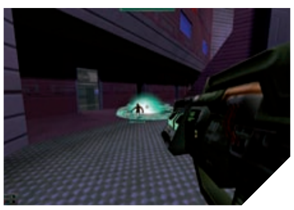
TC-11 Grenade Launcher
Fairly powerful and multi-purpose – shoots standard frag, proximity, incendiary and EMP grenades. Surprisingly large amounts of ammo for it, too.



Annelid Crystal Shard
Incredibly sharp shard of crystal, much more effective than the wrench, but does require exotic weapons aptitude.



Fusion Cannon
A powerful weapon in normal mode, comes with 'death' mode, too, firing slower shots with more lethal impact.



Projected Cryokinesis
Uses the Psi Amplifier for a level one heat draining power without much punch. Uses very few psi points.



Kinetic Redirection
The level one Psi Pull is more of a utility than a weapon, but its ubiquitous application is useful.



Localised Pyrokinesis
This has a low level and low visual effect psi ability that places a fiery shield around you.

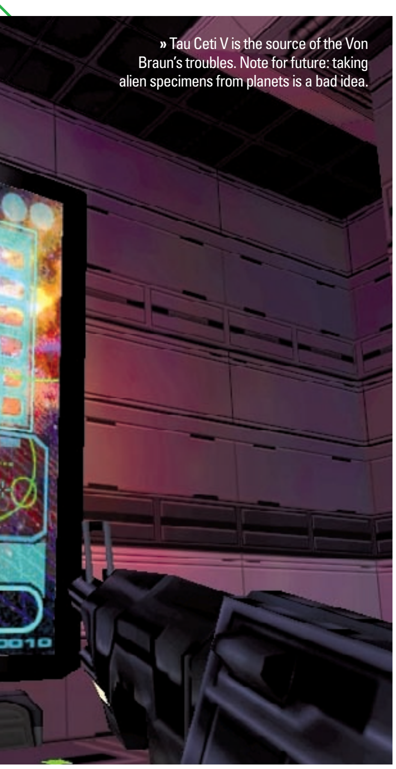




What this translated into in *SS2* was fixed mechanical AI-like turrets and security cameras hitting an alert status when you came within close proximity and opening fire. In the case of the cameras, you'd have a few seconds to hide before a security alarm was sounded and baddies spawned in attack mode at regular intervals until the alarm timed out. Humanoids in both *SS2* and *Thief* (guards and monsters in the case of *Thief*, cyborgs and hybrids for *SS2*) featured the full spectrum of AI alerts and had as much dialogue written for their intermediate alert statuses as for their attack mode. *SS2* cyborgs could be heard to say "Where are you sir?" while *Thief* guards would mutter to themselves, "He must be here somewhere", and would even downgrade back through the alert strata if you ran away and lost them for long enough. "Sound plays a more central role in *Thief* than in any other game I can name," said Tom. "It was the primary medium through which the AIs communicated both their location and their internal state to the player… In *Thief*, the AIs rarely 'cheat' when it comes to knowledge of their environment. Considerable work went into constructing sensory components sufficient to permit the AIs to make decisions purely based on the world as they perceive it. This allowed us to use player sounds as an integral part of gameplay, both as a way that players can reveal themselves inadvertently to the AIs and as a tool for players to distract or divert an AI."

This AI perception and distraction mechanic in particular became an integral part of the experience in the following two *Thief* games, and has become a standard feature for first-person games with even a small element of stealth since, with *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion*, *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Shadow Of Chernobyl* and *BioShock* being notable recent examples. Sound was now a more prominent actor on the stage and two Dark Engine games were proving the difference that good technology and sexy audio hardware can make to a gaming experience. Looking Glass followed *SS2* and *Thief: The Dark Project* up in 2000 with another Dark Engine sequel, *Thief II: The Metal Age*, taking on board the criticisms made of the first in the series by putting more emphasis on stealth. Otherwise, it was recognisably a Dark Engine game using similar adopted features, and this was the final official use of the engine before it was put to bed.

Both *Thief II* and Ion Storm's *Thief III: Deadly Shadows* (which used a heavily modified version of the Unreal Engine 2) used a tiered AI alert system, but featured it as the driving mechanic of the game. *Deadly Shadows* in particular gave birth to the idea that there really was no place too sacred or safe from the increasingly cunning and dexterous Garrett, who could scale walls and climb through windows to rooms behind impossibly locked or guarded doors. *Thief* had introduced the concept of the light gem to gamers and the third game in the series pushed it to new levels of immersion. If you stepped into the full illumination of a torch or moonlight, then the gem would glow brightly, indicating the potential of any nearby guard spotting you and leaping into full alert. Conversely, in the deep black of the shadows, the gem would wink out and you could slip by unnoticed. Push the difficulty setting up and the guards became noticeably jumpy, and while they were unlikely to spot you even when several feet from your position if you were flattened against a dark wall, make a move – especially if you ran, rather than walked – and the gem would glow regardless of low light and how little noise you were making. In this situation and on the hardest difficulty setting, any nearby guard in search mode would be virtually guaranteed to spot you, and as most could sap an entire health bar with a couple of swats from their blades, it made hugging the shadows and stealth mandatory. Stealth



» Tau Ceti V is the source of the Von Braun's troubles. Note for future: taking alien specimens from planets is a bad idea.

kills were the only realistic means of engaging a solitary guard at this level, creating an especially tense game when being hunted by groups of tenacious and unpredictable soldiers.

The idea of using new sound technology with AI to heighten atmosphere and increase gameplay was almost as rapidly taken up by developers as PC gamers, who were investing increasingly in sound hardware. Not least of all these developers was Ion Storm, founded in 1996 by John Romero, who incidentally worked at Origin Systems prior to its acquisition by EA in 1992. Two of the key people who worked on *System Shock*, Warren Spector and Harvey Smith, came along later for the ride with him. Up until that point, Ion Storm's Dallas studio had proved a massive money pit, with flops like *Dominion: Storm Over Gift 3* and the notoriously protracted *Daikatana*, but fortunes were about to change in 2000 with another new IP. Even in the early stages of development, the dynamic AI concept adapted from *SS2* for *Deus Ex* was surprising the team. In an interview with IGN, level designer Steve Powers described a situation where he "jumped three feet in the air" when an enemy NPC found its way into a restaurant he was working on and ambushed him in the cooler – the only indication of its presence was the hanging meat swaying gently from its recent disturbance. "The world just took on a life of its own and even the person who built the location and placed the NPCs and objects couldn't predict what would happen."

> **"The world in System Shock 2 took on a life of its own"**
>
> Level designer Steve Powers on the dynamic AI concept

Deus Ex wouldn't be recognisable for the game it is today if it wasn't for *System Shock 2*, due in part to the MVPs steering its creative direction. It was cyberpunk in genre, an FPS/RPG hybrid and had multiple parallels with the Irrational/Looking Glass game, including a broad inventory system, object manipulation, hacking and an imaginative musical score that changed appropriately depending on the situation: whether you were taking a stroll, engaging in conversation or in combat. It also featured a sophisticated character advancement system, rewarding the player with skill points that they could pour into a pool of abilities, plus nano-augmentation. As far as the gameplay was concerned, this had much the same effect as the rare OS-UP stations found in *SS2*. *Deus Ex* built upon all of these features, especially the career system where investment in firearms at the expense of stealth abilities, for example, created a soldier rather than an assassin. A character's class was far more pronounced in *Deus Ex*, which was one of the weaker facets of *SS2*, despite it giving the player an explicit career choice of Marines (heavy and assault weapons), Navy (light weapons and computers) and the OSA (Psi-abilities) at the start of the game.

But plot and character interaction was one legacy *Deus Ex* took into a league of its own. When he was asked what a computer RPG meant to him by Warren Spector at the concept stage of *Deus Ex*, co-designer Harvey Smith replied, "I want to be able to fully explore



» All androids are malfunctioning, but the garden variety will greet you politely and explode in close proximity.

HACKING THE SYSTEM

Hacking and its medieval equivalent, lock picking, was a great idea. It gave the player some tangibility to a skill that their character was growing in ability with, plus it gave them a break from the main game for a minute or two. If they succeeded, it rewarded them immediately. Hacking in *System Shock* placed the player into a cyberspace similar to that of *Tron* and as hacking had a major role in the game, you could be in there a while before you found a way back out again. *SS2* trimmed this idea back, turning hacking into a mini-game with a small terminal that appeared in the top left of the screen and a grid of circuits, which had to be joined for a successful hack. *Deus Ex* and to a greater extend its sequel, *Invisible War*, automated this process by placing a loading bar and a computer terminal on the screen. *Vampire: The Masquerade – Bloodlines* was more imaginative about hacking, presenting a command-line terminal that would respond only to a minimum threshold of hacking skill – the inspiration, no doubt, behind *Fallout 3*'s ingenious hacking system.

Locking picking in Eidos's *Thief* series was a more physical game, of course; using a deft touch with the mouse, you positioned your lockpick in the lock while turning the tumblers, wary of breaking the lock at any moment. Both *Morrowind* and *Oblivion* used a similar idea to great effect.

Most of these hacking/lock picking systems had one thing in common: they were performed under pressure of failure, discovery, or both, heightening the tension.

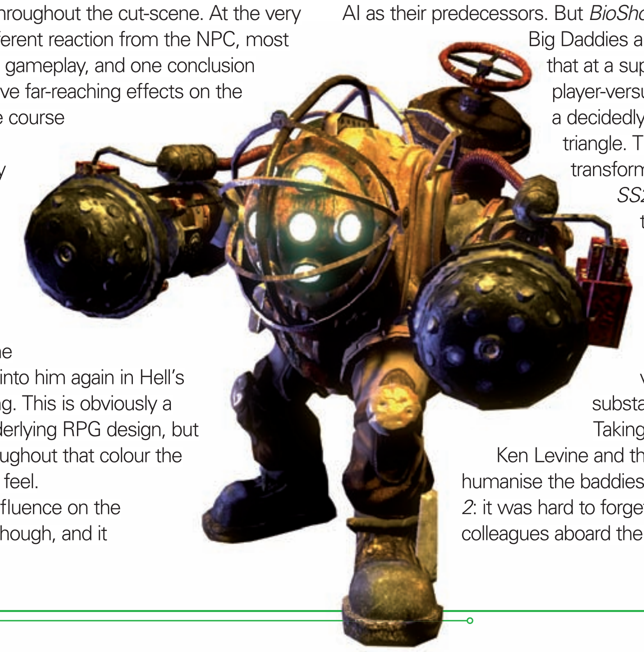


A SHOCK TO THE SYSTEM

and interact with an environment in as immersive, self-expressive as way possible. If something occurs to me in the game world, I want to be empowered to try it. And I want the results of the action, even if they are not always what I expected, to be interesting and plausible." Undeniably a result of Harvey Smith's own experiences on the original *System Shock* – and a creative vision apparent in *Deus Ex*. A focal part of the design was interaction with a massive array of NPCs within a dynamic storyline. JC Denton would communicate directly with these characters, which wasn't exactly revolutionary in itself for an action-orientated game, but for the fact that you would have different dialogue options throughout the cut-scene. At the very least these elicited a radically different reaction from the NPC, most made tangible differences to the gameplay, and one conclusion of a single conversation could have far-reaching effects on the plot that completely changed the course of your game. Moreover, almost every character could be killed by the player or another NPC. For example: kill Johnny, one of JoJo Fine's heavies, and Sandra the prostitute would provide you with valuable information. Frighten him off or otherwise incapacitating him would have the same effect, but if you bumped into him again in Hell's Kitchen, he'd run away screaming. This is obviously a minor example of *Deus Ex*'s underlying RPG design, but there are hundreds of these throughout that colour the game and lend it a more organic feel.

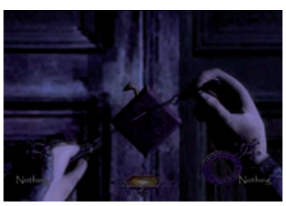
We've saved *SS2*'s biggest influence on the games industry to date for last, though, and it comes in the form of a single multiformat title released in August 2007. Singling *BioShock* out for special treatment is cheating ever so slightly on our part, as it was made by one half of the original *SS2* team, Irrational Games, and was intended as the spiritual successor to *SS2* anyway. But it received universal praise, with only a minority of *System Shock* purists blindly criticising it for the parallels that can be drawn between the two games. They weren't wrong about the sheer number of similarities, though – there are dozens of very explicit examples: Splicers, turrets and other baddies can be compared almost directly to *SS2*'s menagerie of creatures and even have similar AI as their predecessors. But *BioShock* also introduced the iconic Big Daddies and Little Sisters, an unlikely pair that at a superficial level alone, turned a player-versus-environment scenario into a decidedly more complicated combat triangle. Then there were *SS2*'s Nanites, transformed into a substance called Eve, *SS2*'s reconstitution chambers that translated directly into Vita-chambers, psi abilities made a return (albeit far fewer than the 40 available in *SS2*) along with plasmids, and the concept of permanent augmentation via cyber-modules became the substance Adam.

Taking the comparisons deeper still, Ken Levine and the team made the same effort to humanise the baddies for *BioShock* as *System Shock 2*: it was hard to forget that Hybrids were once your colleagues aboard the Von Braun, when they were so

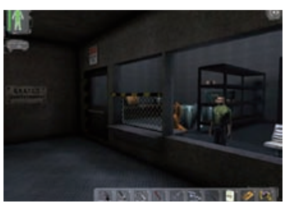


THE LEGACY

Thief: Deadly Shadows
Ion Storm's first and last *Thief* videogame, having picked it up from the defunct Looking Glass Studios, was the third and most successful of the series to date. It was developed for the original Xbox as well as PC, which had a hand in simplifying the interface and control system, though it lost nothing in the process.



Deus Ex
Warren Spector's Texan studio venture got off to a shaky beginning in 1996 and for the four years that followed it, but somewhat made amends with *Deus Ex*. PC gamers, having had their appetites whetted for dystopian science-fiction videogames of this ilk the previous year, seized upon this cyberpunk vision.



BioShock
While the *System Shock* franchise floated in the ether, the announcement of *BioShock* came as a small comfort to fans, which grew into hot anticipation in the many months leading up to its release. Unbelievably, *BioShock*'s deep storyline, stunning art deco look and excellent design exceeded almost everyone's high expectations.



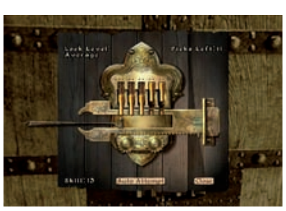
S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Shadow Of Chernobyl
The original *SS2* concept had been fairly well disseminated and evolved by the time GSC's *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* went into production, but there's no doubt the game had a hand in inspiring the Ukrainian developer. Player choice, intelligent use of your environment and freedom to roam play a particularly large part in this FPS/RPG.



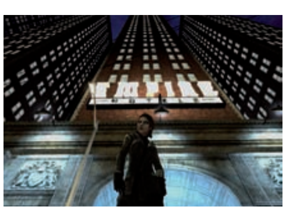
Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic
Taking a leaf straight out of *Deus Ex*'s handbook on how to conduct yourself in conversation was 2003's *KOTOR*. Arguably BioWare was going that way anyway, having a pedigree in role-playing and dialogue-driven games, but the company's foray onto console was a huge success.



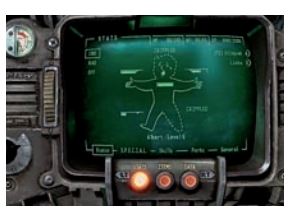
The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind
A year prior to *Knights Of The Old Republic* and another RPG hit-factory, Bethesda Softworks was also trying its luck with console ports of a traditionally PC title. *Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind* was a particularly sophisticated role-playing game, so it was a brave move on Bethesda's part – and one that paid off.



Vampire: The Masquerade – Bloodlines
The swan song for Troika was bug-ridden, but very ambitious. It was the first game other than *Half-Life 2* to use Valve's Source Engine and involved an enormous amount of sneaking around, the effectiveness of which was decided by your disciplines. Despite being horribly unfinished in parts, it received high praise.



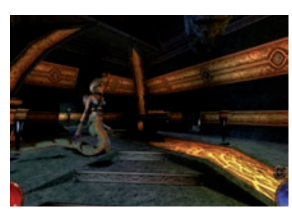
Fallout 3
Bethesda already had the technology from *Oblivion*, so it adapted it for the new episode of the *Fallout* licence acquired from Interplay. Naturally the videogame went in a completely different direction from its predecessors, but the first-person RPG/FPS hybrid concept brought it more in line with the likes of *SS2*.



Neverwinter Nights
Apart from the role-playing game theme, BioWare's *Neverwinter Nights* only has a tenuous amount in common with *SS2*, though it does share a designer: Paul Neurath. We like to think that the rich fantasy setting, character creation system and divergent storyline was helped by his work with Irrational.



Arx Fatalis
Looking Glass Studios influenced the design of Arkane Studios' *Arx Fatalis* massively, though the inspiration was derived from *Ultima Underworld* rather than *SS2*. Nevertheless, it still featured the stealth and character system familiar to *SS2* and once again the work of videogames designer Paul Neurath.



BY THE SAME DEVELOPERS

Freedom Force (2002)
Not to be confused with the 1988 Sunsoft title for the NES, Irrational developed this superhero title under EA. The heroes themselves were authentic to Fifties, Sixties and Seventies comic book characters, and the game was universally acclaimed, the RPG/strategy hybrid preceding NCsoft's *City Of Heroes*.



SWAT 4 (2005)
Irrational published this tactical shooter under Vivendi, and was built on its modified Unreal Engine 2 technology, the Vengeance Engine (the same used to create *Tribes: Vengeance* the year before). It was a squad-based tactical shooter in the vein of the *Rainbow Six* series and proved a very popular title.



Tribes: Vengeance (2004)
Another science-fiction game from Irrational, this time with a focus on first-person shooting. It was intended as a prequel to Dynamix's 1998 title *Starsiege: Tribes* and featured jet packs used in combat and to get around. It reviewed well but, released in the same year as *Half-Life 2*, failed to sell much.



Flight Unlimited (1995)
The first of Looking Glass Studios' trilogy of flight simulators featured advanced dynamic physics, partly due to the talents of physicist Seamus Blackley. It was an acrobatic aviation game with realistic controls that manipulated the aircraft's surfaces rather than directly controlling the plane itself.



Terra Nova: Strike Force Centauri (1996)
Looking Glass's *Terra Nova* was a strategic FPS game set in the far future around the Alpha Centauri star system. Using PBA (power battle armour), you undertook missions in different environments. It did well critically, but was a complete flop and the IP has since been abandoned.





» Blood and gore is par for the course these days, but *SS2* was a fairly gratuitous game for its time.

good at giving an occasional glimmer of residual humanity, straining out "I'm… sorry" before launching a violent attack. And using similar methods, Irrational turned the denizens of Rapture from evil freaks into maligned creatures unwittingly driven mad by their own substance abuse and the insane designs on one overseer. Little Sisters were originally going to be insects, but in the words of lead designer Joe McDonagh, "no-cared", so Irrational threw another moral conundrum into this underwater melting pot of iniquity, by making them into little girls. Even *BioShock*'s plot moved to a similar beat as *System Shock 2*: audio logs and the odd ghostly sighting provided a backdrop to Rapture's downward descent into chaos, SHODAN and the hive mind of The Many were substituted for a more charismatic Frank Fontaine and Andrew Ryan, while a rather enigmatic Atlas replaced the disembodied voice of Dr Polito – to the extent that a very similar twist involving Atlas awaited the player only a few hours into playing the videogame.

One of the more intriguing wheels *SS2* helped set in motion is the concept of emergent gameplay; given a diverse combination of around 20 weapons and 40 psi abilities, the player had scope for exploring many different methods of dispatching a single foe. It was one of the early pioneers for giving players the tools to create solutions that were far more than the sum of their parts, but eight years on, *BioShock* proved far the cleverer game in this respect. With its dynamic combat environments plus combination of plasmid, psi, conventional weapons and security hacking, a resourceful player could come up with a solution to a situation worthy of an SAS handbook. Big Daddies could be swayed to fight for your cause and then dispatched when on the verge of collapse, turrets hacked and forced to rain bullets in one direction to cover your back, and Splicers frozen in place while you used telekinesis to batter them with a safe… this is just a very small selection of the more obvious means of tackling your foes, but *BioShock* delighted us with its creativity.



» Harvest (read: kill) or rescue the Little Sister – *BioShock* presents the first of many moral decisions.

"BioShock delighted us with its creativity"

SS2 has influenced many games, notably its spiritual successor BioShock

While *SS2* hasn't been the single most defining influence on the games industry, its originality and conception have undeniably had a knock-on effect for many games released in its wake. Several titles since have directly benefited from *SS2*'s hindsight, including and especially *BioShock*, which may not have existed at all otherwise. Or, at least, come close to achieving the plaudits that have made it one of the most acclaimed games in history. As for Irrational Games (now 2K Boston), it's almost as if it boomeranged *SS2* deliberately, developing some ideas while leaving others in a more rudimentary state, flinging *SS2* out there to mature before taking it back to its bosom to create a spiritual successor. A ridiculous notion, of course, but with few developers planning things better than this, that doesn't take such an enormous stretch of the imagination to conceive. The current legacy of *SS2* comprises of some of the top PC and console games of the 21st Century: as well as *Deus Ex*, *BioShock* and *Thief III*, its influence can be seen in games like *Knights Of The Old Republic*, *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion* and *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* And for the future, titles like *BioShock 2*, *System Shock 3*, *Deus Ex 3*, *Thief 4* and beyond will all owe something to that talented Looking Glass/Irrational duo and the prodigious game they created.

遠くの稀で、エキゾチックなゲームを愛する人々のため

FULL OF EASTERN

ONE OF THE MOST EXPENSIVE SATURN GAMES AROUND, BUT IS IT ONE OF THE BEST?

SHINREI JUSATSUSHI TAROMARU

Why Time Warner Interactive's ninja game deserves your full attention

IN THE KNOW



- **PUBLISHER:** TIME WARNER INTERACTIVE
- **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** SEGA SATURN
- **ALSO ON:** N/A
- **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP
- **RELEASED:** 1997
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £270+

CAN'T IMPORT? WHY NOT TRY...

ALISIA DRAGOON



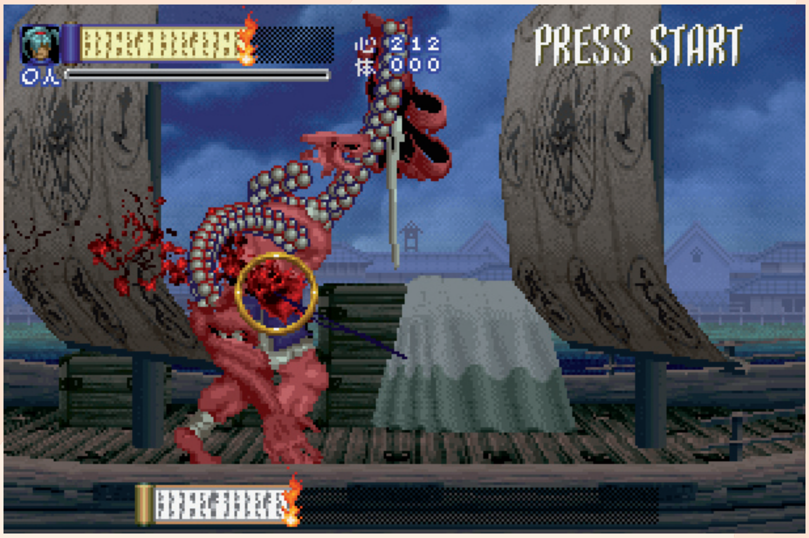
Sega's Mega Drive title is nowhere near as impressive as *Shinrei Jusatsushi Taromaru* but it features very similar gameplay and is far easier (and cheaper) to get hold of. Check it out if you're looking for some classic 16-bit fun.

IN THE BELLY OF THE BEAST

If only all bosses were like this... *Shinrei Jusatsushi Taromaru* has some cracking bosses, but the giant frog that awaits you at the end of one of its lengthy stages is easily its most spectacular. Swatting at you with its giant arms as you run along a floating log, the giant amphibian eventually braces itself and begins to suck both you and your floating platform into its huge waiting maw. After you've been spat out – losing a fair amount of energy along the way – you're eventually pelted with frogspawn until the whole process begins again. Even the frog's death leaves little respite for you as you're sucked into its cavernous mouth and must then battle against stomach ulcers and disgusting segmented worms in order to earn your freedom. Gruesome, brilliant stuff that never gets tiring no matter how many times we play through it.







メガ駆動機構

Sega's Saturn is no stranger to expensive games, with *Radiant Silvergun* and *Panzer Dragoon Saga* rarely leaving you much change, if any, from £100. Despite that rather princely sum of cash there's a Saturn game which continually sells for even larger piles of money, and unlike its peers it continues to climb in price.

That game is Time Warner Interactive's *Shinrei Jusatsushi Taromaru* – more commonly known as *Psychic Killer Taromaru, Spirit Killer Taromaru, Psychic Assassin* or for the sake of this article, just *Taromaru* – and it's a truly spectacular effort from a company that had barely found its place in the videogame industry before it was quickly bought out by Midway Games. Of course, some would argue that oblivion is a suitable fate for the studio that unleashed the likes of *Cheese Cat-Astrophe Starring Speedy Gonzales* upon the world, but the brilliance of *Psychic Killer Taromaru* argues otherwise and, while it's not exactly in the same league as *Saga* or *Silvergun*, it's nevertheless a Saturn title that all fans of the machine should experience.



» You can't see it here but this background actually spins around as you're moving along. It's a very neat trick that still impresses.

Taromaru quite frankly looks stunning and it features a level of graphical trickery that you'd usually expect to see from a Treasure title – interestingly Hiroshi Iuchi, one of the graphic artists, worked on the likes of *Gunstar Heroes* before returning to Treasure. Granted, it doesn't boast the most colourful of palettes but it constantly manages to impress with its sheer verve and audacity. Scaling, rotation, transparency effects, amazing-looking water – an insane amount of spectacular-looking effects continually assault your battered retinas, and while some might argue that certain

GAMES FROM THE EAST WHICH NEVER MADE IT TO UK SOIL

N PROMISE



» This skeleton occasionally belches forth a huge sheet of flames that needs to be jumped over. Impressive stuff.

sprites look a little rough around the edges – they do – they'll still be picking their jaw off the floor by the time they've seen every last boss and level that *Taromaru* has to offer.

Utilising a 2.5D structure that has proven popular with more recent releases like *Viewtiful Joe*, *Ultimate Ghosts 'N Goblins* and *Castlevania Chronicles*, *Taromaru*'s levels are just as impressive as its visuals, with your ninja battling through a variety of different environments before he finally reaches his goal. Quaint Japanese villages, a treacherous boat crossing, a desperate race through a burning building – the list goes on and on. Granted, many of the levels are fairly generic in their structure and have been seen a hundred times before in similar games, but they've been constructed so thoroughly that you can't help but be impressed by them.

If *Taromaru*'s intricately detailed levels and beautifully animated sprites impress you, then just wait until you witness the ridiculous amount of amazing bosses that are constantly thrown at you. In another nod to Treasure, the many bosses you face are intricately designed and normally require an insane amount of hits before you can actually defeat them. They also feature devious attack patterns, meaning it's going to take a fair amount of working out, and damage, before you discover the best way of defeating them. Fire-breathing skeletons, huge undead spiders, pulsating cubes, demonic floating faces, the list goes on and on and you'll find yourself constantly persevering with *Taromaru*'s often fiddly controls, if only so you can see what the next bizarre creation is.

Indeed, the only fly in this otherwise excellent ointment of oriental shenanigans is that *Taromaru*'s controls can be… well a bit of a bitch at times. While the game itself is very fun – think *Shinobi* crossed with the Mega Drive game *Alisia Dragoon* – the actual controls can take a hell of a while to get used to and, for many, won't justify the £200 price tag it often goes for. Unlike many other *Shinobi*-styled games, you actually control an icon that floats lazily from enemy to enemy. Pressing the B button will attack foes, while continual stabs of the A button will turn certain enemies to your side until they're eventually defeated.





Needless to say, this cursor can sometimes have a mind of its own and won't necessarily lock on to the biggest threat (although you can select different opponents manually), which can be a bit of a pain, especially as enemy attacks are relentless. Then there's the fact that you can't move whilst firing – unless you're in the air – which instantly makes you an easy target. Now, some would say that this simply adds to the challenge, and while that's true – to an extent – it just makes combat in *Taromaru* far trickier than it actually needs to be. It's a shame as this is otherwise solid stuff. A double tap to the left or right will cause your ninja to run in that direction, the C button handles jumping (hold down first for a *Castlevania*-style slide move), while the Y button – or a quick double tap down – throws up a handy shield that blocks most enemy attacks.

Another issue with *Taromaru* is its insane difficulty level. Sharing all the hallmarks of an arcade game, *Taromaru* has ridiculous difficulty spikes that can be a real chore to play through if you flying solo (the addition of a second player obviously makes a huge amount of difference). . As with most shmups, perseverance eventually pays off and it won't be long before you can use the available credits to fully complete *Taromaru*, but it's certainly frustrating while you're doing so.

Luckily, things become far easier and enjoyable when you have a friend in tow, but we can't help wondering how much better *Taromaru* would have fared if its controls were that little bit tighter.

Don't get us wrong, *Shinrei Jusatsushi Taromaru* is not a poor game by any stretch of the imagination. It's just that compared to many of the other big hitters in the Saturn's back catalogue, it just doesn't have quite the same quality attached to it, especially considering its huge price tag. It's definitely worth experiencing, simply because it pushes the machine in directions that only Treasure would have thought of, but you're going to have to have very deep pockets in order to appreciate everything Time Warner's game has to offer.

» Another difficult boss. You need to attack it whilst staying within that tiny gap.

» The controls are tricky to begin with, but once you've mastered them you'll enjoy what *Taromaru* has to offer.



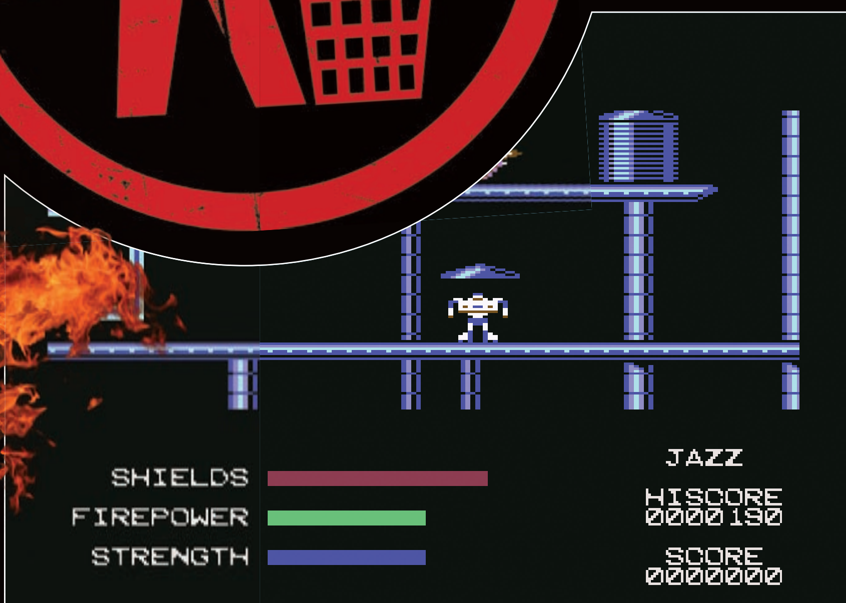
私を読み、私に書くことができ、私に知らせれば好みのゲームはある

RETRO SHAMER

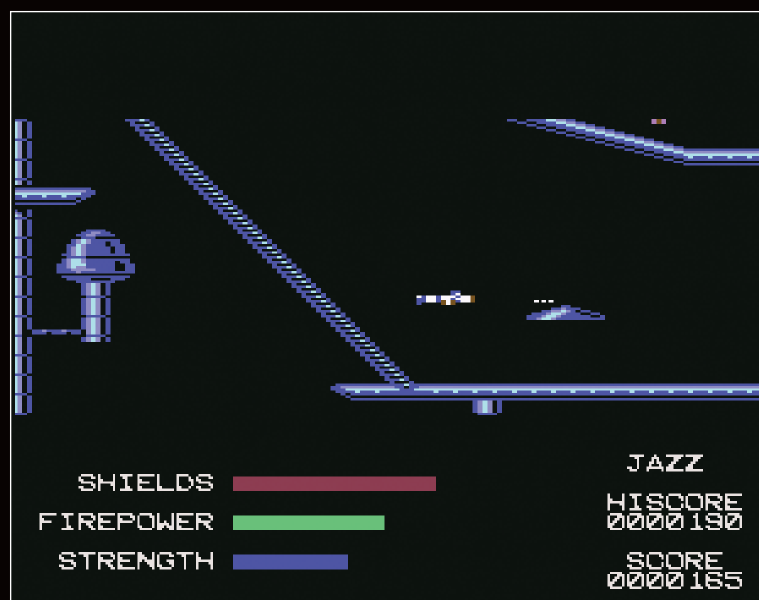
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TRANSFORMERS

THE TRANSFORMERS DOMINATED THE WORLD BACK IN THE MID-EIGHTIES. THE ROBOTS IN DISGUISE HAD THEIR OWN COMIC, CARTOON SERIES, TOY LINE AND EVEN UNDERPANTS, SO YOU CAN ONLY GUESS THE HEAD-IMPLODING EXCITEMENT KIDS FELT WHEN THEY SAW THEIR MECHANICAL HEROES LAND THEIR VERY OWN GAME...



» Look, it's Jazz! How cool's that, he looks just like he does in the cartoon. Kind of…

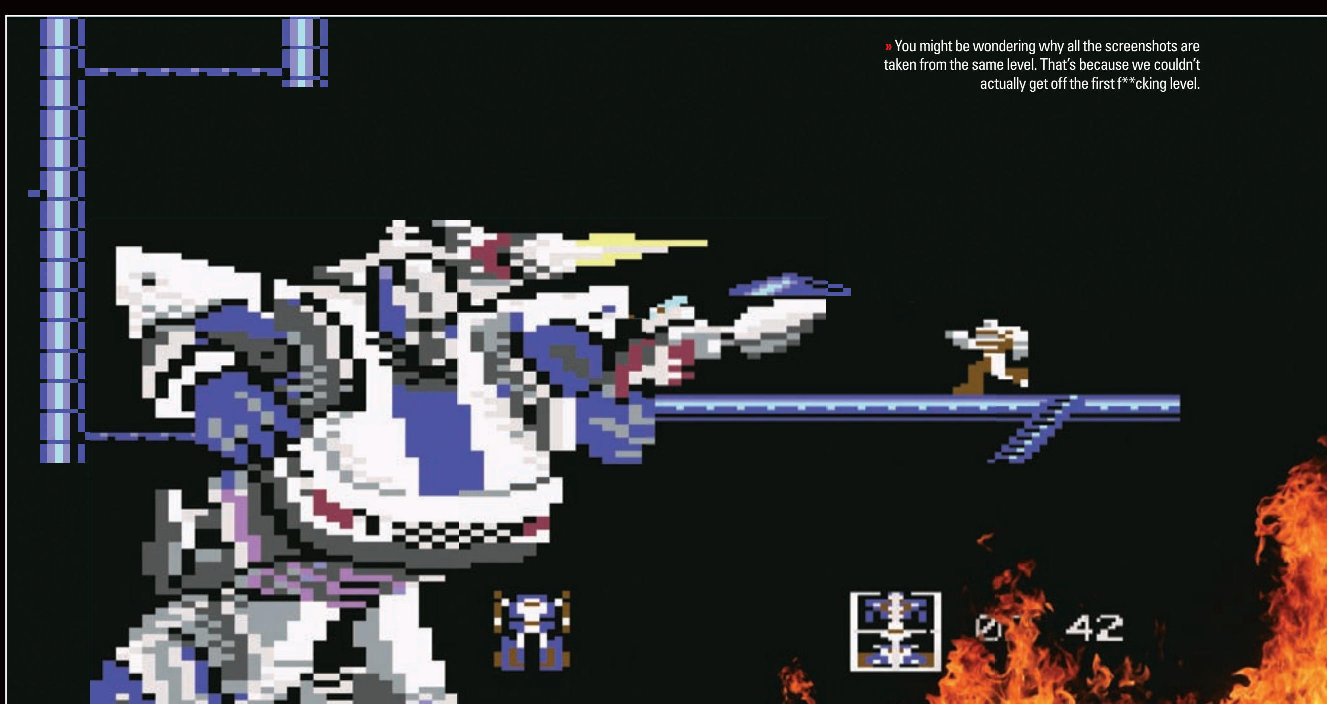


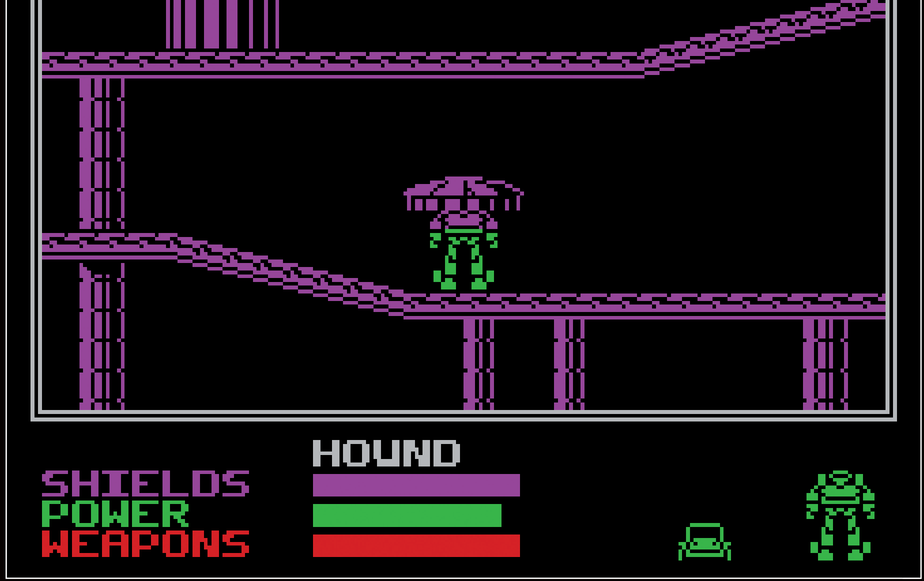
» *Transformers* isn't the worst game we've featured, but it's definitely the worst featuring the Transformers.

IN THE KNOW



» **PUBLISHER:** OCEAN
» **DEVELOPER:** DENTON DESIGNS
» **RELEASED:** 1985
» **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £1+
» **WHY PLAY THIS WHEN YOU CAN PLAY:** WITH THE ACTION FIGURES

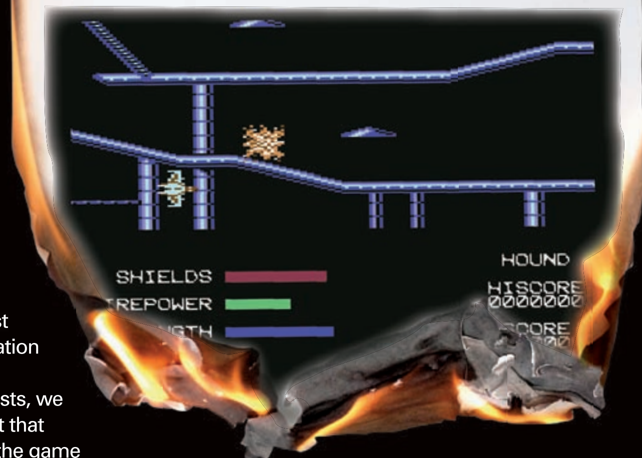

» You might be wondering why all the screenshots are taken from the same level. That's because we couldn't actually get off the first f**cking level.



» Ah, a re-enactment of that famous scene from the cartoon where Hound was stuck with a purple umbrella on his head…

POINTLESS PART

There can be nothing more frustrating in a computer game than seeing your character fly into the air and then explode into a ball of fire simply because it happened to land on a surface that wasn't perfectly horizontal. Oh, actually there is one thing more frustrating: to see it hit its head on a platform and explode into a ball of fire. Or to switch from one character to another and see it leave this world for an ethereal one via the medium of a ball of fire. That would probably do it.



When playing Ocean's *Transformers* you can't help but think that a great game almost existed inside its spools. Designed by Denton Designs, a developer famed for turning out great-looking and challenging games, *Transformers* certainly keeps to the company's usual remit. It has an annoying 'one more go' vibe to it, but that doesn't make for a great game. Oh no. Unlike Denton's brilliant *The Great Escape* or its equally consistent *Where Time Stood Still, Transformers* is simply a casualty of style over substance.

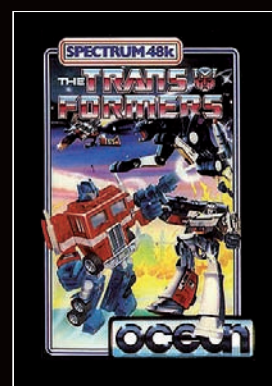
In the game, the player assumes the role of the heroic Autobots – Optimus Prime, Hound, Jazz, Mirage and Bumblebee – and must help the five by switching between them on the fly, retrieving the four parts of the fabled Energon Cube, which has been scattered in annoyingly hard-to-reach places around a bunch of blue scaffolding. Attempting to stop our heroes, of course, are the evil Decepticons, the maniacal and equally robotic and transforming villains from the cartoon, led by the evil Megatron. The Decepticreeps will ruin your life, continually flying into our heroes like kamikaze pilots, and they'll annoyingly respawn and continue to drain an Autobot's energy and shields quicker than Busta Rhymes can shout 'Autobots, roll out'.

The game isn't without a few praise points, though. The most impressive thing about the game is the excellent music: the funky rendition of *The Transformers*' iconic theme tune is brilliant, as are the graphical representations of the Transformers. Each of the five characters in the game and their Decepticon foes – which include the likes of Starscream, Soundwave, Megatron and Laserbeak – look like their television counterparts. And, as you would expect, they also take two forms in the game – robot and jalopy – and each affords the character a specific power. In robot form our heroes are slower on the ground but have the ability to fly, while in their vehicular mode they become faster on the ground but ridiculously skittish. In fact, odds are, when you're a vehicle, your Autobot will be travelling so fast across a stretch of platform approximately half the size of a matchstick that he'll drive off that platform and blow himself up before your brain has had a chance to process what just happened. But at least the transformation looks pretty cool.

As we're not sad *Transformers* purists, we can allow ourselves to forgive the fact that none of the Autobots who appear in the game ever demonstrated the power of flight in the cartoon series. What we can't forgive, however, is that controlling them in the air feels like trying to steer a unstable nuclear submarine into the heart of an active volcano. The controls are also overtly finicky and the collision detection overtly unforgiving. Add to this characters who handle with all the deftness of a bunch of feathers in a thunderstorm, and you can begin to see where the biggest problem with the game lies. It's just too damn frustrating.

Our biggest problem with the game though, and the main cause for all the hair-pulling, is just the frailty of the Transformers themselves. In the cartoon series the Autobots were depicted as being strong and robust iron giants, taking each other on in giant fist-fights in a loud smash of burnish and machinery. Not here. In this game, flying an Autobot into a piece of lead piping blows it up instantly, landing one down on a piece of ground that isn't perfectly flat causes it to transform into a ball of flames, and even flying in the air for too long will have a similar effect. Sometimes, even the act of switching between the robots, a function that the game actively promotes, causes them to go into self-destruct mode. And, if all that wasn't bad enough, you also have to keep storing them inside these bizarre silos to regenerate their energy, power their shields, and replenish their weapons. To be honest, the Transformers simply go from being the cool, shape-shifting robots we all lovingly remember from the television show to feeble geriatric droids, with you acting like a care worker as you help them exercise, avoid pathetic environmental dangers, and finally hook them up to life support machines.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS



To be honest, such was the popularity of *The Transformers* at the time of the game's release that Ocean could have just put a picture of a sink on the box and it probably would have sold like *Transformers* at a *Transformers* convention. The image on the box is still pretty lazy, though. It simply grabs a couple of character stills from the *Transformers* sticker album and plonks them randomly on a background underneath the word '*Transformers*'.

A WORD FROM THE MAIN CHARACTER

Hello, earthlings, it's Soundwave here, the loudest member of the Decepticons and the coolest robot in *Transformers*. This, our first foray in the world of electronic entertainment, may have been criticised for being fiddly, ridiculously frustrating, and a load of crap, but have you guys played that game *Challenge Of The GoBots*, the Kmart Transformers? That game came on its very own Laserbeak, which you had to plonk into your very own Soundwave. What do you mean it was actually the better game? You really are starting to push my buttons now. If it wasn't for the fact that I have to lie down in a life support silo right now because I've been talking for forty seconds I would crush you.

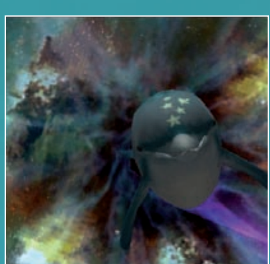


THE MAKING OF...

ECCO THE DOLPHIN
DEFENDER OF THE FUTURE

Embracing everything from the sublime beauty of nature to the ridiculous inventiveness of unfettered science fiction, a relaxed atmosphere suited to casual players to a series of difficulty spikes only conquerable by the devout, Ecco's Dreamcast outing was mixed bag. Tim Henderson is still sifting through the pieces

IN THE KNOW



» **PUBLISHERS:** SEGA
» **DEVELOPER:** APPALOOSA INTERACTIVE
» **RELEASED:** 2000
» **PLATFORMS:** DREAMCAST, PS2
» **GENRE:** ADVENTURE
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5.00

It's a clear day, and the rays from the sun are shimmering upon the pristine white sand of a calm ocean floor. A tranquil mood is set as a school of vibrant fish swim casually by, slowing to hover around a few bobbing strands of seaweed. Above the shimmering slate, a dolphin has but a few moments to take in the colour of the sky before plunging back into the water. Bubbles of oxygen trail behind him as he slices downward, disturbing the sand of the seabed before charging forth and snapping up a brightly coloured snack. Tranquillity then returns as the dolphin, a chipper critter known as Ecco, turns his attention to using his tail to skim his vertical form above the water's surface, chirping happily in the naked sunshine.

Role-playing is core to much of the gaming experience: players are frequently asked to fill the boots of a busty grave robber, put on the overalls of a portly plumber, or slip into the bright red shoes of an oddly coloured hedgehog. From the perspective of standalone gameplay, these skins are largely interchangeable. Level design does take certain traits into account, but when push comes to shove, *Tomb Raider* isn't about being a woman, *Super Mario* isn't about being a plumber, and *Sonic* sure as all hell isn't about being a supersonic hedgehog.

But there are exceptions. Csaba Soltész, co-producer on *Ecco The Dolphin: Defender Of The Future*, is well aware that his game is a mish-mash of design decisions of varied virtue, but he remains confidant about at least one aspect: "Right from the beginning, it was a design principle that Ecco was to be a real dolphin. Our reference was actual dolphin footage, behaviour research papers, et cetera. A huge amount of time went into animating and modelling the dolphin as close to reality as possible."

The effort paid off, and the result was a game of twin focus: on one hand, *Ecco* was a game about protecting the Earth and restoring the future; on the other, it was a sandbox where players could simply enjoy dolphin life. The sense of this was immediately palpable, subtly highlighted by a tutorial level that encouraged players to muck around. "We came up with the concept of a 'tutorial basin'," Soltész explains. "There is no threat, no puzzles to solve, air and fish are plentiful – all the player can do is experiment with the controls, get familiarised with the underwater world, and be stunned by the ambience."

This design decision was gradually tightened up a bit, and this basin would eventually be interrupted by a short cut-scene that set a greater objective in motion. Carefree play came first, though, and a player's introductory moments in *Ecco* would inevitably be spent learning how to swim around,



» Tail-walking was a curious addition to the game. Although never an essential skill for progression, its addition is indicative of Appaloosa's greater goal of ensuring that Ecco was as realistic a dolphin as he could be.



» The core narrative of *Defender Of The Future* involved humanity reaching for the stars. The visual representation for this was an oddly unique, but agreeably organic, take on space travel.

racing other dolphins, communicating via sonar, leaping out of the ocean for air, swimming through gaps in the underwater architecture, tail-walking on the water's surface – everything was keenly focused on replicating the actions and behaviour of the dolphin species.

From a perspective of pure, untethered play, this opening was a sublime showpiece. But from a perspective of comprehensible, taut gameplay, it was the indicator of a muddled experience: "The real issue was the struggle in the design," Soltész admits. "We simply could not decide what *Ecco* really was: is it a glorified tech demo with stunning sight and sound? A hardcore action game with devious difficulty? Or, perhaps, an underwater *Zelda* clone with epic exploration and puzzles?"

Such schizophrenic design may have been the price of attempting to be ahead of the times, and this lack of a concrete focus didn't help with locating a fan base. Soltész himself recognises that, "The ideal target audience had to be the devoted *Ecco* fan who could see beyond the obvious technical issues such as the confusing camera or devious difficulty." This is a less than ideal pool to swim in for a franchise that had skipped a hardware generation entirely, especially when considering the way it polarised both the casual and hardcore markets: "I think that *Defender Of The Future* may have been a bold, unintentional stab at making a more casual experience. Hardcore fans felt quite mad about the relaxed beginning, lack of cinematic storytelling, and abundance of new-age influence," Soltész sighs. "But on the other hand, casual gamers really liked the tranquil nature of the game but were puzzled by the punishing difficulty later on."

Defender Of The Future has become famous – some might suggest infamous – for its difficulty, and it's frequently cited as one of the Dreamcast's most punishing titles. The blame for this may well be directed towards the effort that went into building the technology; all the time spent ensuring that each environment in which Ecco travelled was rife with character and activity, at the cost of other considerations. Soltész is terse with his explanation, stating that, "There were endless struggles about the look of the environments.

However, accessibility was never a critical factor – hence the uneven difficulty." A quick pause follows before he allows himself a chance to elaborate upon the irony of this admission. "Even though the game is as hard as a rock, it allows relaxed exploration in stunning environments and immediately falls into the territory of the infamous 'it's not a game, it's an experience' kind of thing."

An even greater irony lies in the conception and creation of the revered Hanging Waters stage, wherein Ecco had to traverse a maze made out of tubes of water suspended in the sky. When Soltész notes that "at one stage in development the game was very easy, so we had to come up with something challenging," the tone in his voice is so thick that you'd need to bring a stick to have half a chance of wading through it. "I think we succeeded…"

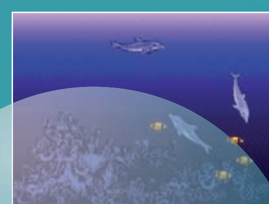
Hanging Waters has since gone down as a classic stage for various reasons. While it was visually stunning even by the standards of an already jaw-dropping game, it also did a fantastic job of adding a fresh approach to the gameplay. "The

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

ECCO THE DOLPHIN (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: MEGA DRIVE, MEGA CD, MASTER SYSTEM, GAME GEAR, WINDOWS
YEAR: 1992

ECCO: THE TIDES OF TIME
SYSTEM: MEGA DRIVE, MEGA CD, MASTER SYSTEM, GAME GEAR
YEAR: 1994

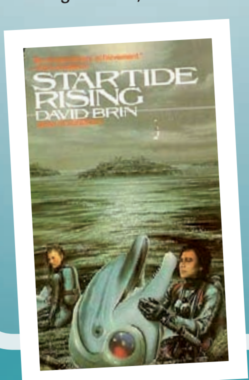
THREE DIRTY DWARVES
SYSTEMS: SATURN, WINDOWS
YEAR: 1996

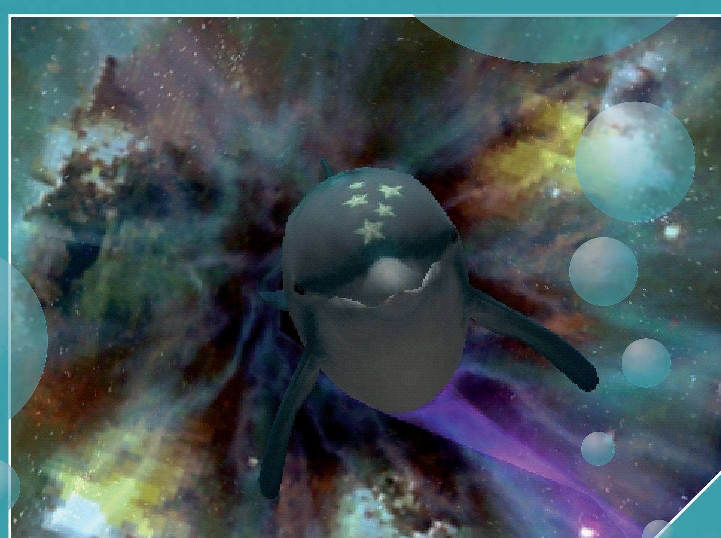


FURTHER FICTION

David Brin is obviously keen on dolphins – almost as keen as he is on promoting his work. "I've always found dolphins fascinating. Like many people, I wondered if they were peers of ours. Not only do they seem very smart, but they are also known to be generous, sometime altruistic, which I convey in my next novel, *Existence*."

Shameless flogging of wares aside, David's *Uplift* universe is widely recognised as integral to the existence of the *Ecco* franchise, with parallels of dolphin intelligence and human co-operation. There are differences, though, such as the *Uplift* mythology, which sees dolphins needing to be 'lifted' to reach a state of sentience: "I deliberately chose a scenario situation different than my *Uplift* universe. Instead of needing human help to gain final sapience, the dolphins [in *Ecco*] had been waiting, with their intelligence deliberately damped-down, for humans to be ready."

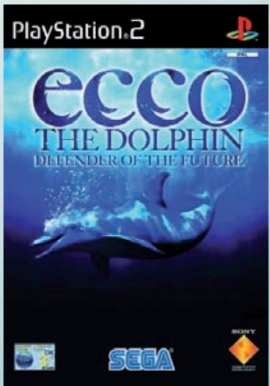




THE MAKING OF...

ECCO THE DOLPHIN DEFENDER OF THE FUTURE

SECOND LIFE

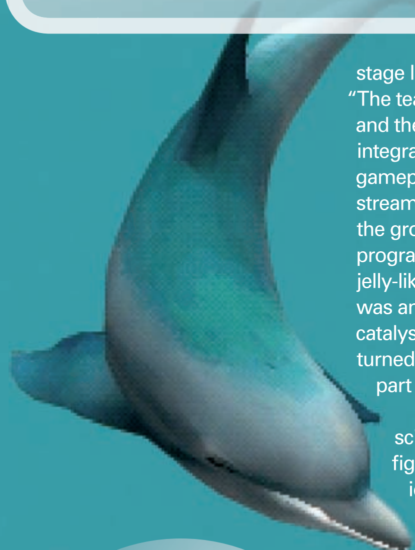


Hindsight is a peculiar thing. It can completely reframe the way we perceive events and provide entirely new context for them. As a risky game released for an underdog console, it's difficult to escape the twisted irony that comes with knowing that *Ecco The Dolphin: Defender Of The Future* was released on 11 September in the USA.

While you can't rest the blame on one peculiar coincidence, the Dreamcast did nonetheless meet an untimely end, and *Ecco*'s status as a platform exclusive jumped ship when Sega itself made the switch from platform-holder to publisher. *Ecco* was re-released on the PlayStation 2 in 2002 and featured a fistful of tweaks as a response to listening to feedback from the Dreamcast release, although Soltész stops shy of calling them anything other than tacked-on. "*Ecco* was criticised for its vague hints, and rightfully so. Later, the PS2 version was upgraded with a 'mission compass'. However, it was more of an afterthought than a solution to the problem."



» Owners of the Dreamcast's VGA box were treated to some especially splendid imagery. *Ecco* still looks impressive.



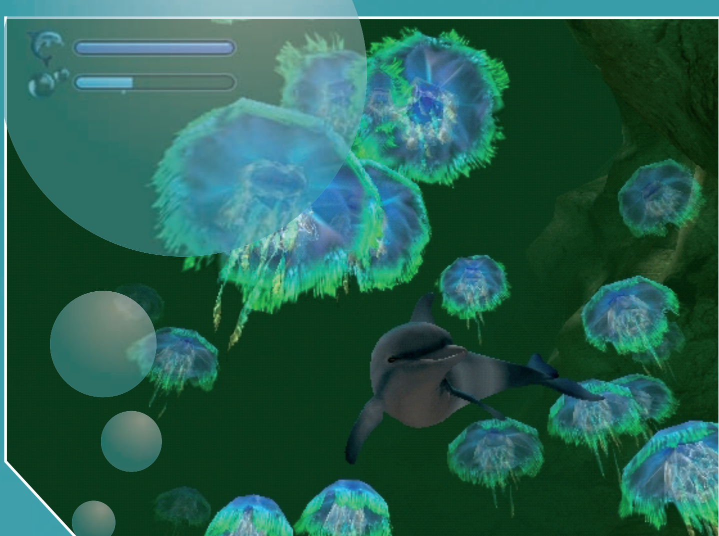
stage lived its own life," Soltész explains. "The team really loved platform games and they came up with an idea to integrate some jumping/hopping into the gameplay. The artists envisioned flowing streams of water suspended high above the ground – hey, why not? – and our programmers created a very unique, jelly-like 3D liquid effect. The final result was an interesting mash-up of ideas catalysed by a true labour of love. It turned out to be the most memorable part of the game."

Why not? Well, that was for science-fiction author David Brin to figure out. As a writer, he was an ideal fit for the project, in no small part because he was himself a potential inspiration for *Ecco*'s initial, 16-bit inception. His 1983 novel, *Startide Rising*, is often cited as a key inspiration for Appaloosa's dolphin, although this is something he has adopted a bashful stance towards: "I think people get too uptight about who inspired what. Heck, when I was ten I read the *Freddie The Pig* detective stories and wondered about writing in a dolphin character. So, *Ecco* can trace its lineage back to a snorting, four-legged land animal!"

Within the direct context of Ecco's Dreamcast adventure, however, Brin's job was to make sure that all the situations that Ecco found himself in were coherently tied together; something that seemed to fit in perfectly with some of his habitual activities. "I love looking at a work of art, or even a bizarre piece in the news, and weaving a little 'what-if' tale around it," he explains. "So when Appaloosa brought me a summary of the gameplay scenes in *Ecco*, I had fun conjuring up a grand story arc to tie the scenes all together and give *Ecco* some personal motives."

These motives ended up being pretty extreme and would focus around the intellectual ascent of dolphins, an alien invasion by a menace known only as 'The Foe', time travel, and the theft and reclamation of the virtues that made dolphins such resilient, enlightened creatures within the game's fiction. This in itself allowed for *Ecco* to be broken up into several themed blocks, while also catering neatly towards the structural need for fetch quests and the progressive acquisition of new abilities.

More still was expressed through the game's visual design, something that in itself was somewhat dependant on the sheer grunt under the hood of the Dreamcast. Soltész recalls a lukewarm relationship with the Saturn hardware, noting that, "The development tools were clunky and the hardware capabilities were somewhat weird." As a result, Appaloosa had begun the development of its 3D technology on the original PlayStation, but it was with the chance to tinker with a prototype Dreamcast that the spark was lit: "We saw the potential sorely missed on the



» At the start, the architecture was built to appear natural. Things became increasingly synthetic as the game progressed.





» The yellow harness strapped to Ecco's back was one of the harder plot elements to swallow, but it served an integral role to gameplay.



» Being set underwater, *Ecco* could to use hardware limitations to its advantage. Fogging, for example, was manipulated to simulate the murkiness of ocean water.

Saturn and vastly upgraded our 3D technology."

Thanks to a mixture of solid architecture and art direction, as well as economical distribution of resources, the end result was a game that still looks impressive today. There was no shortage of care in how detail was distributed, and environments were created with complete awareness of ocean aesthetics. Frequent use of fish and coral kept the scenery colourful and interesting to look at, while drawing free inspiration from HR Giger ensured a menacing flipside future. The murky nature of deep water allowed a chance to increase detail by legitimising shorter draw distances. This extended to the way in which the engine worked, as Soltész explains: "The 3D engine treated the underwater and surface graphics quite differently. The view distance is longer when Ecco surfaces and looks around. Therefore, the artists had to be very careful while constructing the surface world: they could not create as detailed environments as in underwater due to performance problems."

"WE SAW IN THE DREAMCAST THE POTENTIAL SORELY MISSED ON THE SATURN" SOLTÉSZ ON THE DREAMCAST

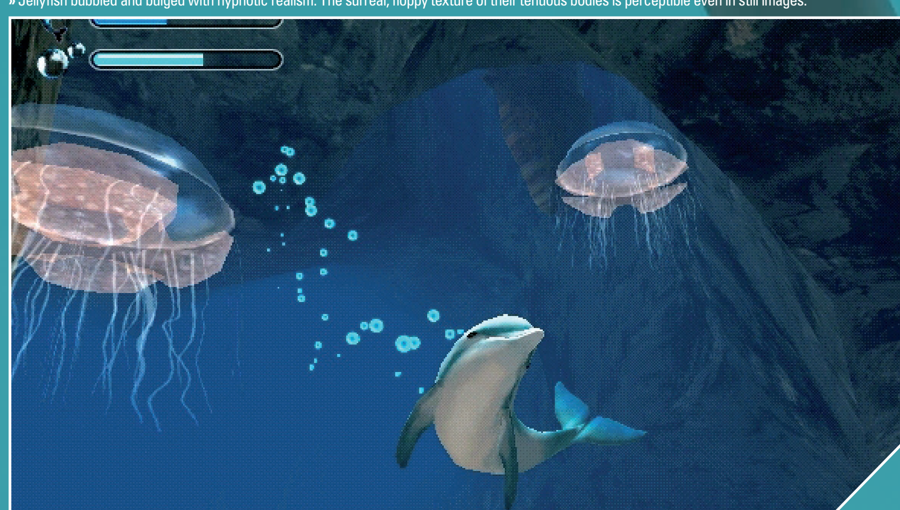
Defender Of The Future was, if nothing else, a slightly confused visionary achievement – Soltész is hardly reticent about his admiration of the Wii's *Endless Ocean*, seeing it as the sort of experience his own game could have been – that was met by equally confused critical responses. It was often complimented and criticised for similar aspects of its design, although nobody dared sing anything other than praise for its pristine underwater world and the way that Appaloosa had come up trumps in creating such a lifelike marine mammal to play as. The game even received accolades for aspects that Soltész himself was uncertain about, such as the choice of soundtrack: "I think the new-age style music was a big mistake – it drags the pacing down too much. Still, the critical reaction praised the in-game music beyond belief."

Released as the Dreamcast was reaching the high of its power, *Ecco* would go on to become one of the last true Sega games: a breathtakingly beautiful, risky, and unique gaming experience that was inherently flawed by a reckless willingness to plunge headfirst into untested waters. As with all the genius that was associated with Sega throughout its hardware era, it proved to be a memorable and triumphant experience in spite of its shortcomings. And although *Ecco*'s future isn't looking promising, and although Soltész may have moved on, he still shows signs of attachment to the studio's mascot. Would he be happy to work on a hypothetical PS3 or 360 *Ecco* game? "Hypothetically, yes." That smile says it all, really.

» It's easy to forget just how stunning *Ecco*'s cover image was, being, as it was, one of the first games to have an obnoxiously large Dreamcast logo pasted across the top.



» Jellyfish bubbled and bulged with hypnotic realism. The surreal, floppy texture of their tenuous bodies is perceptible even in still images.

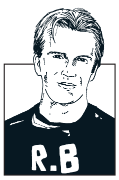


PACIFIC

"WE GOT NO TROUBLES, UNDER THE SEA..."



- **PUBLISHER:** ERE INFORMATIQUE
- **RELEASED:** 1987
- **GENRE:** ARCADE ADVENTURE
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** AMSTRAD CPC
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £7



HISTORY

If you fancy going deep-sea diving and getting all Jacques Cousteau on an Amstrad then you should try *Pacific* by French software house, ERE Informatique. The bends not included…

Deep at the bottom of the Pacific Ocean rests the lost treasures of Atlantis. Now we all know the Pacific is colossal and as if to press home this point the gaming area has been made insanely huge.

Granted, it may well be a time-saving device by lazy programmers to cut corners by replicating a few dozen screens several hundred times over, but, in this instance, it works. They also made full use of the CPC's mode 0 with some very colourful graphics.

After plunging down a few fathoms of harmless blue screens, you get the opportunity to gather your bearings by swimming into one of the sextants placed among the rocks and coral. Immediately, your place in the ocean and the utter vastness of the game becomes apparent as the map appears. One pixel on the map is equal to one of the game's screens…

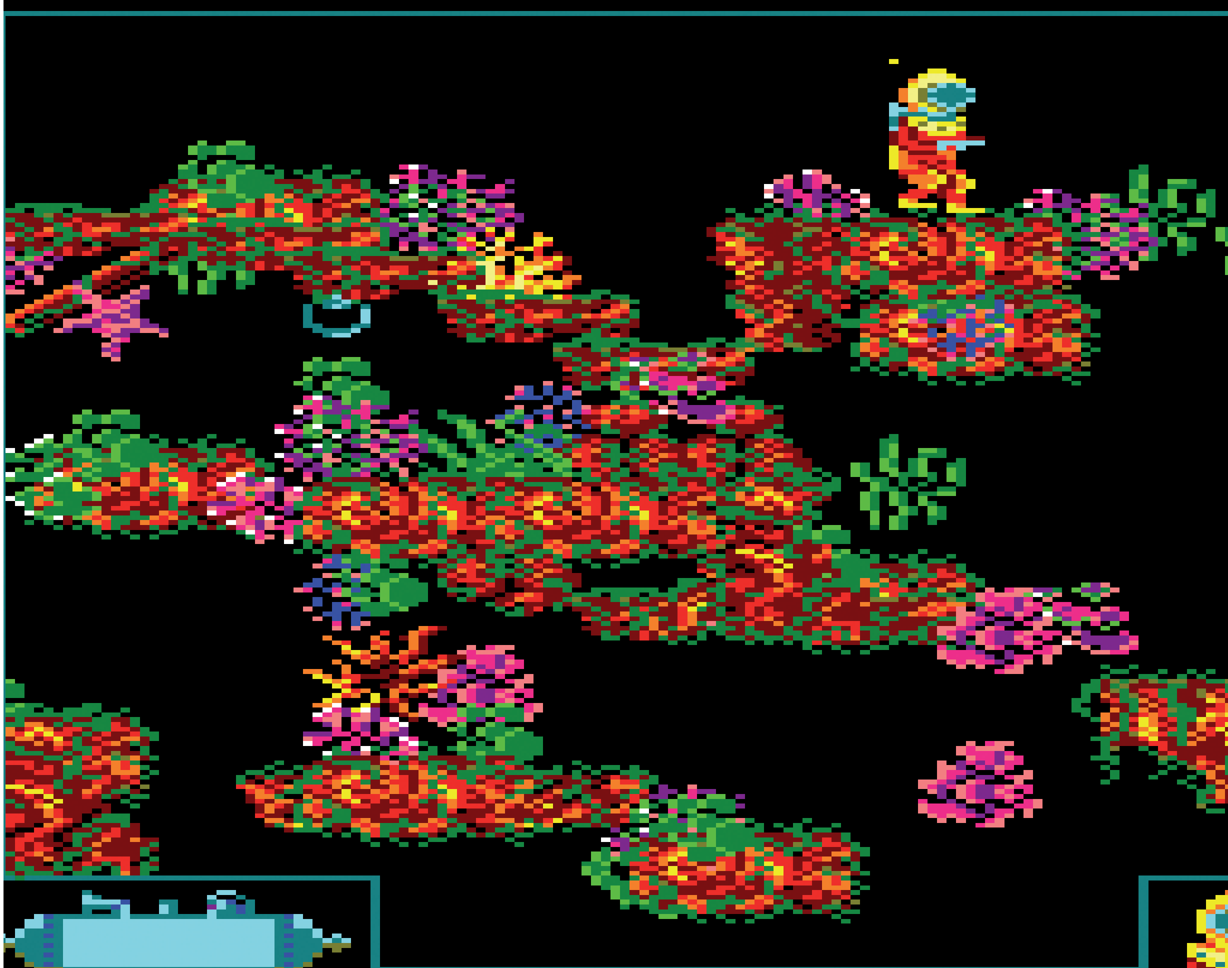
Your three lives suddenly seem woefully inadequate, but extra lives and ammunition for shooting assorted fishy beasties are both available through doors leading into shipwrecks. These diversions are welcome but also very necessary.

Also, replenishing your air supply by using one of the oxygen pumps becomes a regular occurrence as your air runs out at an alarming rate. Mischievously, not all oxygen pumps work and some have been booby trapped with mines.

And there's more explosive fun when you need to locate barrels of TNT to blow up rocky outcrops barring your progress to the deeper depths. Naturally these become an increasingly rare commodity as the game goes on.

After playing for a few hours you might come to the conclusion that the game is just too big for its own good. Some games suffer from their sheer enormity and repetitiveness. *Pacific* isn't one of them. If anything it emphasises that your task is considerable and the Pacific, real and pixelated, is a big old place.









Advert Rising

In-game advertising has changed how we play and see games today – from Tapper to Metal Gear Solid 4, Lara Croft to Blade Runner, we explore the rich history of product placement throughout retro gaming





Today's developers are facing an increasing pressure to raise funds for blockbuster titles, and many turn to advertising and product placement for the answer. Despite a consensus that in-game advertising is undermining the jovial pastures of titles now and in the future, limiting their creativity and immersion, their use hasn't just been conjured up in the last decade as a quick financial fix. Advertising is planted in the origins of the medium itself, reaching as far back as the late-Seventies, with some fascinating results. From the *Tapper* controversy to downloading podcasts in *Metal Gear Solid 4*, we explore some of the most memorable products in this History Of Advertising In Retro Gaming.

The first alleged mention of advertising was in *Moonlander* (1973) for the DEC GT40 graphics terminal. The precursor to Atari's *Lunar Lander*, the aim was to land the vehicle on a flat surface of the moon, rendered in glorious vector graphics. Some versions featured an Easter egg where you could land on a McDonald's restaurant and destroy it, and even order a burger if you landed close enough to not damage it. Although it's doubtful the fast-food giant commissioned the placement, its love affair with games was just starting – in 1982 it ran the 'Taste The Thrill Of Atari At McDonald's' promotion, giving away Atari 400, 800 and 5200's on *Asteroids*, *Centipede*, *Missile Command* and *Star Raiders*-themed scratch cards.

ADMEN



Chester Cheetah

This cool cat didn't have nine lives in his short-lived foray in videogames. Appearing in back-to-back 16-bit adventures *Too Cool To Fool* and *Wild Wild Quest*, they were lost in a myriad of platformers, failing to capitalise on the mascot successes of the time. Sporting shades and sneakers, this lanky feline chomped on Cheetos to restore health in his sluggish games, visiting locales such as 'Euphreka', 'Omahog' and 'Lostin', which proved too 'radical' and 'bodacious' for gamers to contend with.

> "McDonald's love affair with games began in 1982 with its 'Taste The Thrill Of Atari At McDonald's' promotion"

However, the first 'game' advertising was in the Scott Adams text adventure *AdventureLand* (1978), the first commercially sold title for home computers, which featured an advert for the sequel, *Pirate Adventure*/*Pirate Cove* (1978). Adams placed an obvious billboard an hour into the game, in an area containing two visible items: a 'Bottomless Pit' and 'Large Outdoor Advertisement'. After typing 'Read sign', the following message was displayed: "Check with your favourite computer dealer for the next *Adventure* program: *Pirate Adventure*. If they don't carry '*Adventure*' have them call: 1-305-862-6917 today!" Although Adams said the advert "tickled the funny bone of some reviewers", the phone number could actually be used to order future titles.

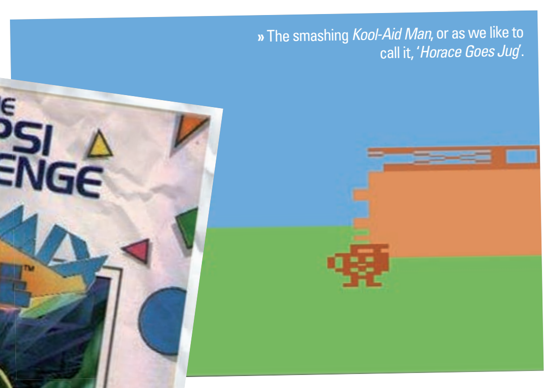
1983 – A Videogame Crash And Advertising Boom

Despite Parker Brothers (of Monopoly fame) planning a (scrapped) McDonald's title for 1983, officially the very first



» In the original version of the excellent *Shenmue* the vending machines were stockpiled with Coke cans.





» The smashing *Kool-Aid Man*, or as we like to call it, '*Horace Goes Jug*'.

Advert Rising

title with corporate branding was *Pepsi Invaders* (1983), an Atari-produced rip-off of *Space Invaders*. Allegedly a straight-up hack of the Taito classic, and not a clone, the invading ships were replaced by the letters 'P E P S I', which had to be blasted away as you dodge incoming fire. The top banner also strips away at regular intervals to show a flying Pepsi logo (as opposed to a UFO), which can be shot down for extra points. Interestingly, there is no way for Pepsi to win – you always come back each time you are destroyed, and at the end of the three minutes the screen triumphantly displayed 'Coke Wins'. The colour scheme also subliminally displayed everything as black, red or white, with the Pepsi letters a corporate blue. Along with Atari 2600 consoles, the game was given as a gift to Coca-Cola executives at a conference in Atlanta, Georgia. Only 125 copies were produced on blank cartridges and it remains a highly sought-after collectors' item, selling for as much as $1,800 today.

Also released that year were two more promotional titles for the 2600. Johnson & Johnson commissioned *Tooth Protectors* – a *Pong*-like game where teeth must be defended – a rare game only available to those sending off coupons to the company. The more popular *Kool-Aid Man* was available commercially, opening with the signature wall-breaking mascot from the US TV adverts. Controlling a jug, the aim was to stop 'thirsties' stealing juice at the bottom of the screen (which acted as your health bar), with power-ups that transformed you into the mascot to deal out some heavy damage.

The placement wasn't just a last-minute product of advertising, but it was built from the ground up with the mascot in mind. General Foods commissioned Mattel with the licence to make a game, with the developer holding an internal competition for the best designs, which was won by Steve Tatsumi. He admits there were plans for an identical Intellivision version: "Marketing wanted one design for both games… but we eventually changed their mind to have two different games.



» *Superfrog* was a great-looking platformer about a Lucozade-guzzling frog trying to rescue a princess.

The Intellivision game design would not have been practical on the 2600. Plus I think the 2600 game design was better." He was right, the Intellivision version, a platformer about rescuing children, wasn't held in the same light as the 2600 version by gamers, which still has a cult following.

So far advertising was a series of dedicated products, and not placements in existing designs. However, Midway unleashed *Tapper* into the arcades later that year, a bartending game of throwing (not simply serving) drinks across bars, that featured a deluge of Budweiser product placement. Despite original intentions for units to be exclusive to bars and clubs, the cabinets were available pretty much everywhere, including child-friendly arcades. After complaints from parents worried it'd turn their children into future alcoholics, Midway pulled and replaced the game with the teetotal *Root Beer Tapper*, which can now be found on Xbox Live Arcade.

Food giant Quaker Oats had purchased US Games in 1982, with the games division developing several Atari 2600 clones, including *Piece O'Cake* and *Eggomania*, surprisingly all brand free. Whether it overlooked videogames as a commercial potential didn't matter as the 14 titles it developed were all



Regional Differences

Despite globalisation giving us a fast-food restaurant on every high street, many products are only available in certain places. This trend is mirrored in videogames, where brands are dropped out of certain regions altogether. Commodore 64 title *Action Biker* (1985) is presented by KP Skips' Clumsy Colin, who is replaced by generic art in the North American release, however, the actual gameplay itself was identical. *T-Wrecks* became *The Muncher* (1988) on the C64 thanks to Chewits advertising, but again, aside from the menu, it was the same game: a T-Rex hunting down stolen eggs in Japan. Aren't Chewits worth saving?

Even if products have a global outreach, their mascots often do not. The removal of Pepsiman from Western releases of *Fighting Vipers* (Saturn, 1997) and 7 Up from certain versions of *Cool Spot* (1993) are such examples. It was thought that Spot would tread on Fido Dido's toes outside the US if he was associated with the brand, and so he was demoted from devoted mascot to plain platforming star. Because of this, the 7 Up bottle was removed from the introduction and replaced with a message-in-a-bottle in PAL releases.

One of the more interesting localisations was Capcom's *Yo! Noid* (1990), a NES platformer starring the Domino's Pizza mascot, which was in fact a skinned version of Japanese platformer *Kamen No Ninja Hanamaru*, which was created earlier that year. Although the level design and music was largely intact, the sprites and backgrounds were entirely changed and filled with promotions to help the Noid get a 'pizza' the action.





» Zool, he's a ninja ant from the 'Nth Dimension' which is also known as Planet Chupa Chups.

> **"After the industry recovered in 1987, the all-American brands emerged stronger than ever"**

flops, and, combined with the videogame crash of 1983, the division closed after just one year.

The crash was also the reason we didn't see *Pac-Man Plus* (1982) on home computers. The forth title in the series was almost identical to previous versions, but replaced the fruit with other items, including a suspicious red-and-white can power-up – an unofficial Coca-Cola placement. Despite being one of the hottest properties of the decade, the pellet-munching icon wasn't immune to advertising. Featuring in a 'The Difference Is Clear' 7 Up advert that same year, Pac-Man drinks 7 Up instead of power pills, and ends up enjoying the beverage with Blinky and co. The sweeping isometric maze featured a very Eighties vibe, featuring *Bette Davis Eyes* by Kim Carnes that had alternate 7 Up lyrics to add to the nostalgia.

1984-1990 – Mid-Eighties Drought

In North America, whether because of the videogame crash, the *Tapper* incident, or publishers not seeing enough potential, there were few examples of product placement for several years. Publishers were still keen to place their own logos as billboards – Atari in *Pole Position* (1983), Ocean in *Decathlon* (1984) and Nintendo in *Tennis* (1984) were just a few examples. However, on this side of the pond KP Skips' own Clumsy Colin raced into Mastertronic's *Action Biker* (1985) and the Chewits monster invaded *T-Wrecks* to become *The Muncher* (1988) (see 'Regional Differences' boxout). Japan was just starting to dip its toes into the tepid waters of product placement at this point, too, with several Yu Suzuki titles using it for realistic billboards, such as *OutRun* (1986) with KTM

ADMEN



Noid

Despite the well-known catchphrase, developers didn't want to "Avoid the Noid". A red-suited, bunny-earred villain embossed with an 'N' on his chest, the only sane thing about Noid was his desire for stealing Domino's Pizza during his Eighties adverts. C64's *Avoid The Noid* asked you to stop him stealing your steaming dough, and NES platformer *Yo! Noid* took our antihero to New York to stop the ominous Mr Green. He has since been killed by Adam West in *Family Guy*.

Bikes, and the bizarre use of Radio WLAK 94, Max Christmas and Victory Furniture in *Power Drift* (1988).

After the industry recovered in 1987, the all-American brands emerged stronger than ever, with *Pac-Man* clone *Mad Mix Game: The Pepsi Challenge* (1988) and Domino's Pizza's *Avoid The Noid* (1989) hitting the Commodore 64. Popular Electronic Arts title *Skate Or Die!* parodied the trend by using 'Healthy Nutritious Food' and 'Waremouse Records' billboards in the game (as opposed to their real-life counterparts Whole Foods and Warehouse Records).

1990-1996 – The Golden Years

It wasn't until the Nineties that product placement really hit its stride, making its way to consoles, with more food and drink products than you can shake a can of Coke at. Konami's *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles II: The Arcade Game* (1990) featured Pizza Hut posters and a coupon included with the manual of the NES release. Gaming giant Capcom released another Domino's Pizza title, this time on the NES with *Yo! Noid* (1990), a platformer that was originally the Japanese *Kamen No Ninja Hanamaru* (see 'Regional Differences' boxout). Capcom also developed *The California Raisins: The Grape Escape* (1990), based on a fictional musical group of raisins featured in North American commercials, which had a similar level structure to *Mega Man* and *Duck Tales*. However, it was never released due to the diminished popularity of the brand, despite published reviews and copies being manufactured, and has become another sought-after collectable in this long history of product placement.

Platformers needed a cool mascot to stand out from the crowd, and far away from



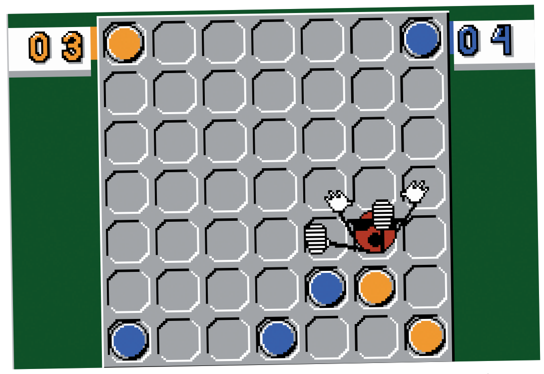
» Even arcade greats couldn't resist getting in on the act. Here's Coca-Cola's take on Taito's classic *Space Invaders*.

Advert Rising

the likes of Sonic and Mario were brand mascots to fill the void. 7 Up's anthropomorphised mascot Spot first featured in multiplatform puzzle game *Spot* (1990) before hitting it big in Virgin Interactive's *Cool Spot* (1993). The objective was to collect smaller red spots, with bonus stages taking place inside a giant 7 Up bottle. Spot later featured in the awful isometric adventure *Spot Goes To Hollywood* (1996), where from there he simply fizzled out. Other notable mascot adventures include Chester Cheetah in *Too Cool To Fool* (1992) and *Wild Wild Quest* (1993), and the Japanese exclusive *Coca-Cola Kid* for the Game Gear (1994). (See 'The Virtual Real Thing' boxout.)

Advertising on home computers didn't go away either, and featured some rather whimsical examples. *James Pond 2: Robocod* (1992) p-p-p-picked up a deal with Penguin chocolate bars on his way to fighting Dr Maybe. According to *PC Gamer*, Penguin outsold Kit Kat for the first time in the year *James Pond 2* was released, perhaps proving that this spot of soul selling really could pay off. (The Penguin adverts were stripped from console releases and recent remakes, however.) Gremlin's *Zool* quite literally sucked, thanks to wave after wave of Chupa Chups lolly placements on a splash screen, the opening menu and every five steps within the game's opening area. Whereas most platformers drop the advertising across regions and versions, it was used everywhere – the Amiga, Genesis, SNES, Master System and even the Game Boy version was covered in sticky lollypops.

Puzzler *Pushover* (1992) featured a 20-second opening cut-scene dedicated to Quavers mascot Colin (fainting over eating a giant crisp) in the computer versions, but was removed from the SNES release. And Lara Croft wasn't the only webbed creature to use sports drinks; Team 17's hidden gem *Superfrog* (1993) used Lucozade as a means of recovering health, and as a pivotal plot point – a prince turned into a frog gains superpowers thanks to the fizzy energy drink. And you thought it only had archeological purposes, eh?



» Cool Spot's first ever videogame appearence was in this Connect 4-looking puzzle game, known as *Spot* (1990).

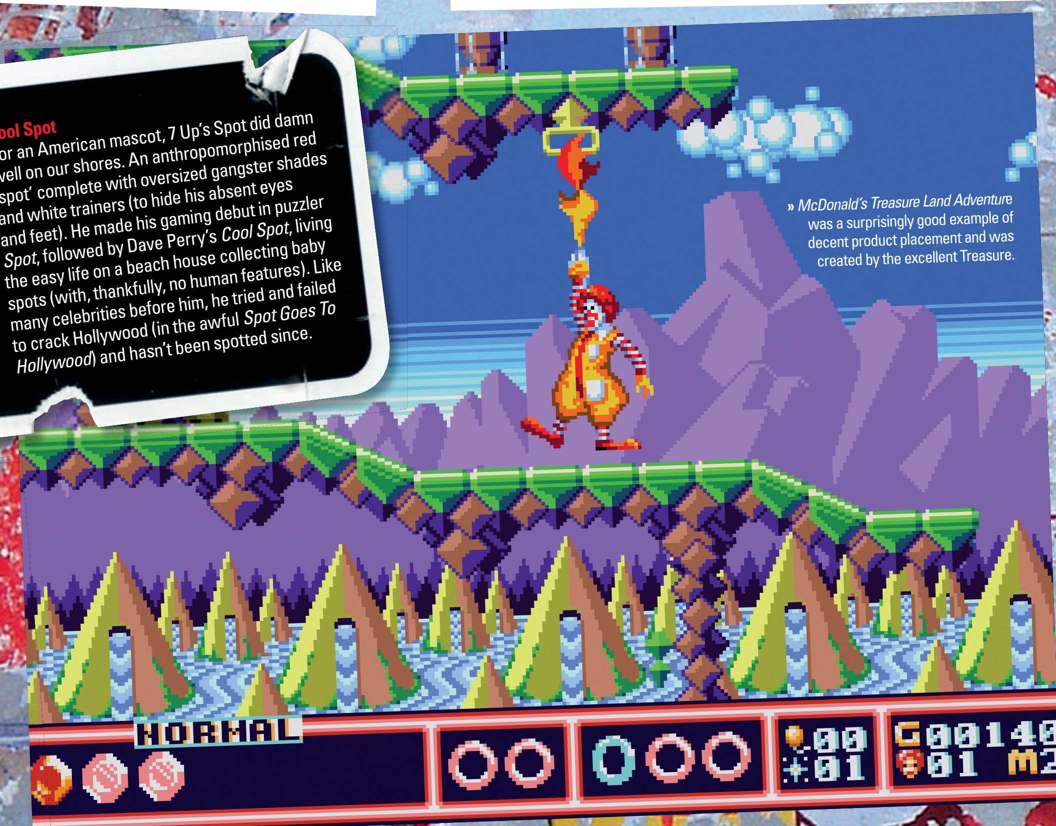
Almost two decades after its first reported foray with *Moonlander*, McDonald's churned out titles faster than Big Macs – *McDonaldland/M.C. Kids* (NES, 1991), Virgin Interactive's *Mick & Mack: Global Gladiators* (1992) and Sega's *McDonald's Treasure Land Adventure* for the Mega Drive (1993). It was somewhat ironic that the aim of *Mick & Mack: Global Gladiators* was to clean up polluted swamps and forests, at a time when McDonald's was under fire for beef cattle ranches destroying rainforests. And, of course, the only way to finish levels was by collecting enough Golden Arches and delivering them to Ronald McDonald.

Advertising had become dominated by product insertions or wave after wave of mascot platformers, but one of the more innovative promotions was *Space Job* (1993) for the Amiga and PC. Developed in-house by German department store Karstadt, it was a simulation of working in the store in the year 2350. Whereas other titles at the time had you controlling advertising icons, this one had you actually managing the company it was advertising. Starting out doing menial mini-games as a store clerk, the faster you do your work the more time you have for evening entertainments like clubbing or gambling.

ADMEN



Cool Spot
For an American mascot, 7 Up's Spot did damn well on our shores. An anthropomorphised red 'spot' complete with oversized gangster shades and white trainers (to hide his absent eyes and feet). He made his gaming debut in puzzler *Spot*, followed by Dave Perry's *Cool Spot*, living the easy life on a beach house collecting baby spots (with, thankfully, no human features). Like many celebrities before him, he tried and failed to crack Hollywood (in the awful *Spot Goes To Hollywood*) and hasn't been spotted since.



» *McDonald's Treasure Land Adventure* was a surprisingly good example of decent product placement and was created by the excellent Treasure.

The Virtual Real Thing

Coca-Cola virtually jump-started in-game advertising with *Pepsi Invaders* back in 1983, so you could argue it's 'Always Coca-Cola'. But unlike most food and drink placements, Coca-Cola has mainly been in the background as a power-up or a billboard advertisement, unlike the various McDonald's-dominated products in the early-Nineties. As an unofficial collectable in *Pac-Man Plus*, a health pick-up in *Parasite Eve II* or in vending machines in the Japanese version of *Shenmue*, gamers have been consuming the fizzy stuff for decades.

There was, however, the Sega-developed platformer *Coca-Cola Kid* that came with a limited edition red Game Gear in Japan (1994). Opening with a digitised bottle pop, pour and fizz over a 'Enjoy Coca-Cola' splash screen, it used the *Sonic Chaos* engine in a kicking, skateboarding promotional adventure. He had the acceleration of Sonic, those signature floaty jumps, and even a spin-dash charge move. But instead of shaking his finger and tapping his foot when he becomes idle, he drinks a bottle of Coke while he waits.

Staying true to its love of television coverage, Coca-Cola collaborated with Squaresoft of Japan to promote *Final Fantasy IX* (2000), with hero Zidane chasing a bottle cap that transforms the residents of Alexandria into carnival-goers, ending in an explosive Coke celebration in the town square. There was also the infamous *Grand Theft Auto* parody, featuring a series of good deeds for local citizens instead of the usual six-star crime sprees. Could this be a jibe perhaps towards the series for its stance on product placement?







ADMEN



Clumsy Colin

Despite being branded as a bit of a klutz, Skips entrusted its brand to Clumsy Colin in the Eighties and shoe-horned him into the British version of *Action Biker*. His ineptness was only apparent in his bizarre dress sense, sporting a blue-and-red jacket with leopard-print trousers, but his fashion faux pas thankfully didn't hinder the isometric gameplay. The navigation-centric game of collecting bike pieces while avoiding oil slicks and other obstacles was no problem for Colin, and has since become a cult hit.

Managing your rest system with a fine balance of work and play would fast-track you to promotion and the exciting world of store management. If only Woolworths had came up with something so bold!

But why innovate at all when you can just skin *Ultimate Doom* with your product and give it away in cereal boxes? The American version of Shreddies, Chex, did just that with *Chex Quest* (1994), replacing practically every texture and sound for maximum promotional use (and to make the mature-rated game child friendly). It sounds rather underwhelming, but this was the first game to be packed in with cereal boxes, and won advertising awards and a cult following. An official sequel, two fan sequels and a *Doom 3* mod continued the story of the Chex warrior fighting off a Flemoid invasion, and is one of the few examples of product placement being widely accepted by gamers.

1995-2005 – More Subtle, But Still There

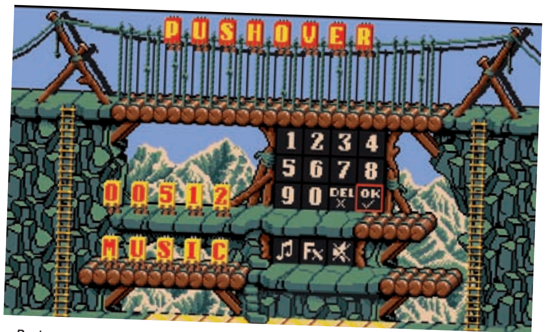
Despite the early-Nineties offering the strongest showing of product placement within videogaming history, the arrival of the 32-bit era and beyond downsized the magnitude of advertising within games. Few games, apart from sports titles, were now dominated by branding, and advertising was used sparingly for creative or immersive reasons. This could be because the move into three-dimensional space made games become more realistic and artistic, instead of the fun and jovial platformers of before.

The PlayStation era also marks a shift from Western to Japanese developers taking the helm with placements, with Squaresoft and Sega dotting them around in their more notable titles. Square featured Coca-Cola in *Parasite Eve II* (1999) for health recovery and in Japanese commercials for *Final Fantasy IX* (2000). Rival Japanese mascot Pepsiman starred in *Fighting Vipers* (Saturn, 1995) with the special ability of "quenching one's thirst." Although unfortunately stripped from other regions, he did make it worldwide in his own adventure, *Pepsiman* for the PlayStation (1999), as he runs, skates and collects cans to – you guessed it – quench some more thirst. What a trooper.

As noted, sports titles were keen to use adverts as a means of adding authenticity and immersion to their brand – Sony Europe developed *Adidas Power Soccer* for the PlayStation, and Konami's fan favourite *ISS/Pro Evolution Soccer* featured Adidas clothing and sponsored billboards. In fact, practically every sports game since the mid-Nineties, from football to racing, has had some sort of menu or billboard advertisement, which has continued until today. The *Gran Turismo* series is such a tour de force that Nissan reports brand popularity has grown significantly due to its dedication in supporting the racing franchise. Maturity and realism in games lends itself well to licensed products, especially when visuals and gameplay really start to mimic their real-life sporting counterparts. After all, playing *Gran Turismo* is the closest thing you can get to taking a Nissan Skyline for a spin without moving from your sofa.

The Sega Dreamcast was full of quirky titles, which paved the way for an array of products being used in novel ways. Arcade smash *Crazy Taxi* (2000) featured perhaps the largest

Advert Rising



» *Pushover* introduced the character G.I.ANT and turned out to be a surprisingly polished puzzle game that we still occasionally return to.

ever product roster, driving citizens to their important meetings at KFC, Pizza Hut, Tower Records, Fila and Levi's. In a subtle nod to Karstadt's *Space Job*, Japan was treated to the bizarre *Segagaga* in 2001. The year was 2025, and with a 3 per cent market share, the CEO asked two teenagers to save Sega – at a time when the Dreamcast's future itself was in doubt. The game was a simulation-RPG with dungeon elements, featuring cameos from its console and character library, including Sonic and Alex Kidd, as well as parodies of PlayStation consoles and franchises (such as 'Final Pharmacy' and 'Ace Wombat'). In what can only be described as the ultimate self-advertisement, it didn't change the console's fate, and it's a shame this bizarre game never saw a Western release.

Present Day And Future

The PlayStation 2, Xbox and GameCube generation was very quiet on the marketing front – only *Super Monkey Ball* (2001) and Dole Foods, Duracell batteries in *Pikmin 2* (2004), and H&M and Ikea furniture sets with *The Sims 2* (2004) saved us from the plight of dozens of FPS clones. The start of this generation saw Burger King make an advantageous leap into gaming, mimicking McDonald's promotions 20 years on, developing three games that could be bought in Burger King restaurants for a humble $3.99 (*Sneak King*, *Pocket Bike Racer* and *Big Bumpin'*) for the Xbox 360 (2006). Even the King himself was an unlockable character in EA Sports' *Fight Night Round 3* (2006).

However, from there, product placement underwent its biggest transformation to date with the advent of dynamic advertising. A controversial debate between journalists and gaming enthusiasts, the internet can now shape advertising space on a regular basis. Instead of hard-coding games with one or two products, it's now possible to change adverts to anything at any time, following trends as they happen. For example, in 2007 the Scottish government spent £100,000 on in-game advertising for drink-driving awareness, in titles such as *Project Gotham Racing 4*, *Pro Evolution Soccer* and *Need For Speed Carbon*. This was praised by awareness groups as innovative, especially as it was aimed at a key demographic. (If only Capcom knew this when it developed the doomed *The California Raisins: The Grape Escape* all those years ago!)

There is little doubt why dynamic advertising is such an attractive option – modern-day high-definition projects cost



ADMEN



The Muncher
The children of today will never know the horrific past of Chewie, the loveable face of Chewits. His alter ego was The Muncher, and spent his days taking names, kicking ass and burning down buildings. He was so powerful in the mascot underworld that T-Wrecks was renamed The Muncher, but couldn't be bothered to chase soft, individually packaged sweets and went after T-Rex eggs instead (like in the originally intended product). Rehab and a facelift have since made him more marketable.

Memorable Game Adverts

When publishers aren't trying to get products in their games, they're trying to branch them out into other media. Games have been marketed more as the industry grows, but there have been some notable growing pains from the usual suspects. Several Microsoft campaigns for the Xbox have been banned, including the 'Life Is Short, Play More' mantra of a man flying from his birth to his grave-smashing finale, offending both those bereaved and those expecting. Sega also got into a spot of trouble with the ASA for falsely advertising 'up to 6 billion players' on the Dreamcast, when not even a tiny fraction were even available to play the doomed console.

Featuring in *Blade Runner* (1982) just before the videogame crash didn't bode well for Atari, who was caught up in its infamous curse along with several other then market leaders. Bell, Pan-Am, Cusinart have since experienced bankruptcy in some form, and now Atari is just a brand name that will probably have changed hands once more by the time this goes to print. Ironically, two of the companies to make it relatively unscathed were Coca-Cola, a product-placing behemoth that debuted under the hardware giant, and Budweiser, of the *Tapper* controversy.

Perhaps the most memorable series of adverts to hit our screens were the CG Lara Croft Lucozade commercials, whether she was blowing kisses to a pack of dogs, or having a refreshing pause with a camp native, they were well received and helped push Lara to become one of the iconic gaming figures at the turn of the century. In a throwback to gaming history, the promotional website also featured 'Lara's Land Rover Challenge', which was a clone of Atari 2600 *Moon Patrol*. And with a recent resurgence due to the latest *Tomb Raider* games, who knows when she'll be back on our screens?





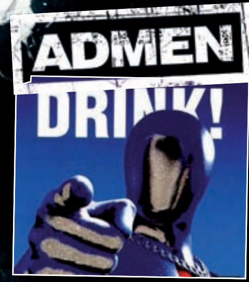
» *Pushover* introduced the character GI Ant and also featured Quavers mascot Colin Curly, who only pops up in the game's intro.

"It's now possible to change adverts to anything at any time, following trends as they happen"

millions to create, and anything to cover the overheads is a great help. Dynamic advertising is currently dominated by Massive (recently bought by Microsoft) whose revenues are expected to grow to $1.8 billion by 2010.

Regardless of its profitable future, it has yet to hit its stride, especially in massively-multiplayer-online games. Activision Blizzard has stated it's not a direction it will go in – probably because many Blizzard titles wouldn't sit well with fast-food-adorned dungeons, and because *World Of Warcraft* is already one of the highest subscriber-paid titles ever made. However, *City Of Heroes* (2004) added dynamic adverts last year, replacing fictional ones already in the game, in a bid to keep the same level of immersion while opening another revenue stream. Until then the most dramatic MMO placement was the addition of Pizza Hut delivery in *EverQuest II* in 2005. Enter the '/pizza' command and you'll have steaming dough on your doorstep in no time at all.

Even as both games and adverts merge with cyberspace, many titles still use traditional hard-coded product placements. Hideo Kojima, creator and director of *Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns Of The Patriots* (2008), defended the use of iPods, Sony Ericsson phones and Triumph motorcycles in an interview with GameTrailers.com. He said future titles will depend on them more for income, especially as they were perfect for reaching specific demographics. He explained that iPods are a fixture of modern lives perfect for immersion, and provided an innovative way of providing developer commentary through in-game podcasts. Other recent games, such as *Rainbow Six Vegas* and *Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory* (2006), use hard-coded Axe advertisements in their terrorist-laden environments.

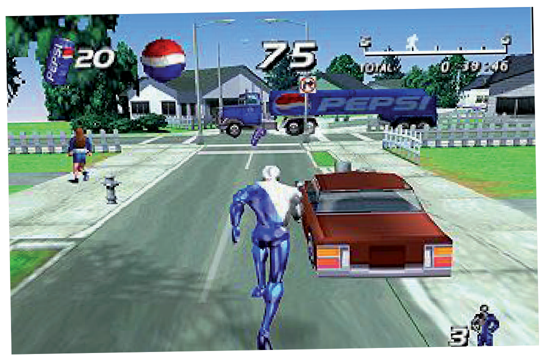


Pepsiman

The look of someone having an accident with a shrink-wrap machine must appeal to Japanese audiences, because the gimped-up Pepsiman was a hit. His role was to "quench one's thirst" by waiting until the last possible second to appear and relieve parched individuals with a can of Cola. After serving up roundhouse kicks in the Japanese version of *Fighting Vipers*, he starred in his own game called *Pepsiman*, running and skateboarding from person to person, because he 'can'. Sorry, could.

While the *Metal Gear* series is the perfect example of a series large enough to get the attention of brand names, many smaller projects don't have the popularity and scope companies look for as advertising potential. It's also a design choice, with the *Grand Theft Auto* series seeking to parody adverts despite an environment ripe for exploitation. And aside from placing adverts within the game environment, there could be a shift of incorporating dynamic advertising as the sole income for future projects. In *Battlefield Heroes* (2009), part of Electronic Arts' free-to-play range, the online shooter is supported entirely by menu adverts and micro-transactions, and the success or failure of such games will shape the direction of advertising for years to come.

Product placement has come a long way since its humble origins in *Moonlander* and *Pepsi Invaders*. It survived a videogames crash and the arrival of the polygon era, and has seen strong online resurgence. While today's projects need adverts to help them stay afloat, they aren't willing to sell their souls like the games of the early-Nineties, and seeing a mascot as the protagonist is perhaps a thing of the past. Yet only now it is seen as a problem that threatens the medium: perhaps games have matured into a more serious pastime, and so adverts should only be used for artistic purposes. While today gamers may tremble at the thought of games being polluted by products, retro gamers swoon at the unique advertising escapades they have had over the decades.



» From *Fighting Vipers* to this – where did it all go wrong, Pepsiman?

THE MAKING OF...



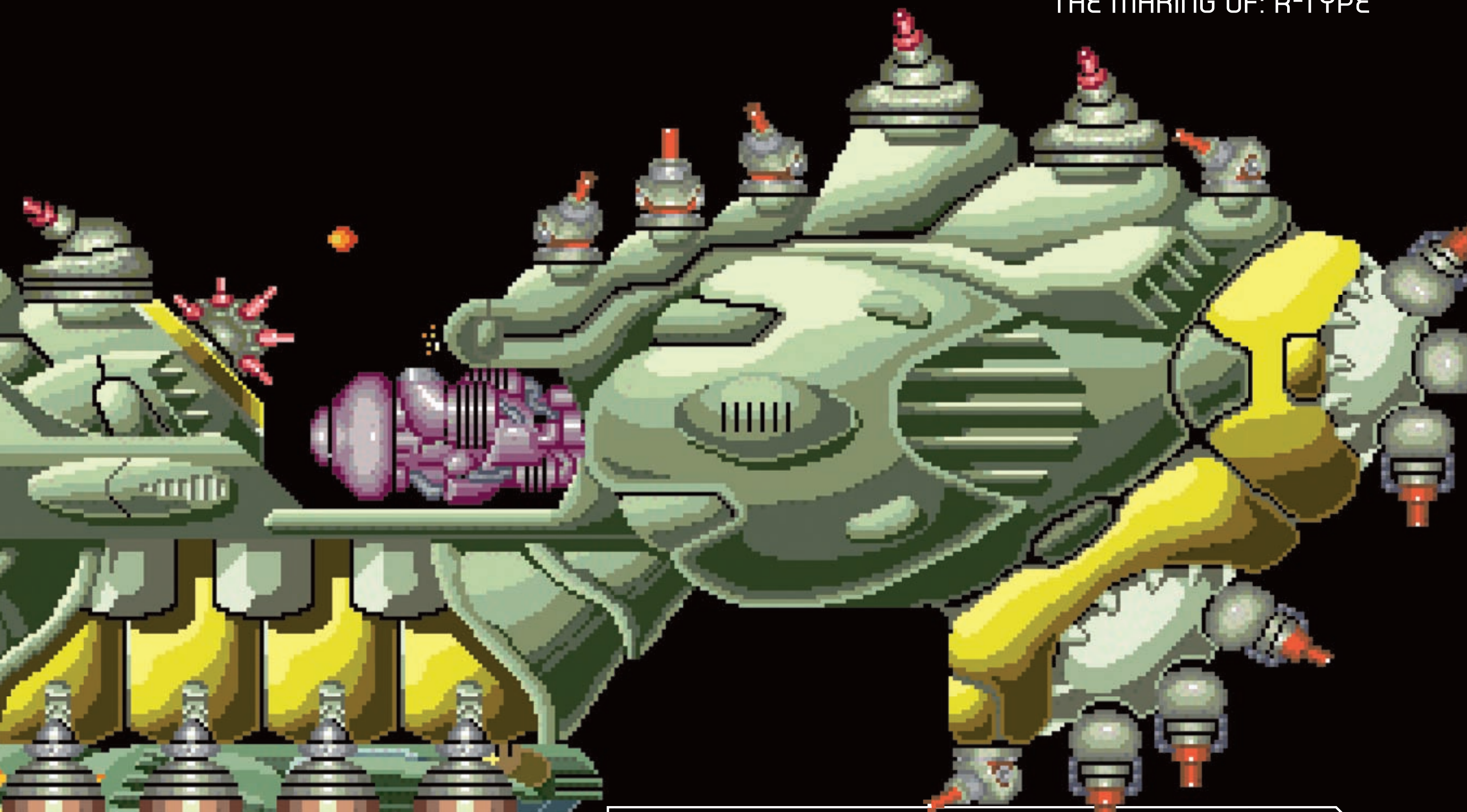
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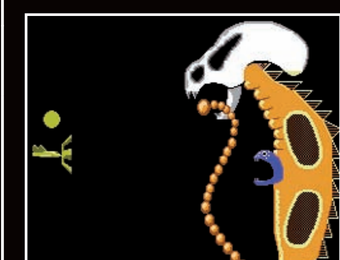
WHILE IT CERTAINLY WASN'T THE FIRST SIDE-SCROLLING SHOOT-'EM-UP, IT REMAINS ONE OF THE MOST INFLUENTIAL, POPULAR AND POLISHED EXAMPLES THE WORLD HAS SEEN. THIS ISSUE, STUART HUNT BLASTS OFF AND EXCLUSIVELY SPEAKS TO PRODUCER **KAZUMA KUJO**, OF IREM SOFTWARE ENGINEERING, ABOUT THE CREATION OF ONE OF THE TRUE MILESTONES OF THE VIDEOGAME INDUSTRY

Developed by Irem Software Engineering, and released into arcades in 1987, *R-Type* opened up many people's eyes to what the shoot-'em-up genre and videogames were truly capable of. Built on Irem's M-72 System hardware – the same guts that would bring us the graphical delights of *Mr Heli* and *Ninja Spirit* – *R-Type* was one of the first and most successful games to appear on the kit. It has since gone on to span a fleet of consistently great games, a series that has dipped in and out of numbering its titles – later substituting them with letters of the Greek alphabet (Delta, Leo) – a spin-off game without the *R-Type* name in it at all (*Armed Police Unit Gallop*), and is now setting its sights on a completely new genre with the recent release of *R-Type Tactics* on the PSP.

The first *R-Type* was renowned for its dazzling visuals, taxing difficulty but wildly addictive gameplay. Its eight levels were faultless in design and were littered with iconic ships, imaginative enemies, dazzling looking weaponry and some of the most epic boss encounters ever seen in a videogame. Set in the 22nd Century, *R-Type* charted the war between the allied R-Type fighters and an evil biological threat known as the Bydo Empire. The original game drapes both fractions in ambiguity, never elaborating on who or what the Bydo are or why it is each side is warring; all the player has to go on are the immortal lines "Blast off and strike the evil Bydo Empire". Subsequent games, however, would elaborate and explain that the Bydo were the creation of man – a horrendous experiment (likely a biological weapon)



TUFF THE MAGIC DRAGON



Despite the coin-op being distributed by Nintendo in the West, the NES never found itself with a port of *R-Type*. However, the game would, kind of, get a very loose port of the game courtesy of Magic Series Corp. The game, titled *Magic Dragon,* is a bizarre clone of *R-Type* that supplements your R-9 fighter for a jet, and turns the Bydo Empire into Deathstar contractors, knights, birds and lobsters. The level layout and gameplay between the two games are very similar, and like *R-Type*, you get a chargeable Wave-type weapon and a variant on the Force Shield. The absolute best thing about the game, though, is the brilliant number Magic Series did on Dobkeratops, which makes the terrifying alien beast resemble something in *Parodius*.

created in the 26th Century before being sucked into a wormhole. Left to evolve somewhere in the dark recesses of space, they grow in strength and numbers, and travel back through time to the 22nd Century to exact revenge on their creators.

The Bydo are depicted as a malevolent force, a malignant virus incapable of reasoning. Their iconic biomechanical style shared an uncanny semblance with HR Giger's seminal *Alien* designs, cleverly helping to add association to their evilness, and the freakish melding of thing and machinery proved unsettling, particularly against the dark and oppressive backdrop of space. *R-Type* was the first game to really adopt this biomechanical style to its visuals, but it certainly wouldn't be the last, as the game spawned a myriad of clones and imitators (see 'R-Types' boxout).

"We thought it would be extremely hard to invoke a big scale atmosphere with a simple biological expression, and this is why we settled on the biomechanical design. I also think by implanting machines into living things, the game became more interesting," recalls Kazuma.

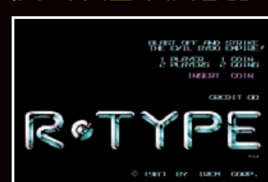
As Kazuma and his team hoped, the unusual look of *R-Type* was enough to pique curiosities and suck the jangling coffers away from trouser pockets. This interest was no doubt bolstered by having the game's first boss, the scorpion-tailed Dobkeratops (also known as Doppelganger, Krell and Gladiator) appear on the cab's side stickers and flyers, which was a common style for shoot-'em-up decor at the time (*Space Invaders*, *Galaxian*, *Millipede*).

Dobkeratops, which the player encounters at the end of *R-Type*'s first stage, became one of the most iconic videogame bosses of all time. His monstrous foetus-like form, entangled in floating eyeballs, takes up almost the entirety of the game screen, and his presence builds tension brilliantly as the player's tiny R-9 fighter is forced ever closer to its grotesque target. Such was Dobkeratops's popularity that Irem would ensure the creature's appearance would stretch the entire breadth of the series. The giant boss can often be seen popping up throughout the franchise, most memorably in *R-Type Final* where he was fully realised in 3D, and awaiting the player in an underwater lair.

"With regard to the design of Dobkeratops, the original model was actually one that our lead designer had since joining Irem, and was used without any changes. With the bosses we made a lot of effort to create unique characters – something that nobody had ever conceived, attacked or seen before."

R-Type was famed for its bevy of imaginative and gargantuan end of level guardians, with the most innovative being the Bydo

IN THE KNOW



» **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
» **DEVELOPER:** IREM
» **RELEASED:** 1987
» **FEATURED PLATFORM:** ARCADE
» **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £400+



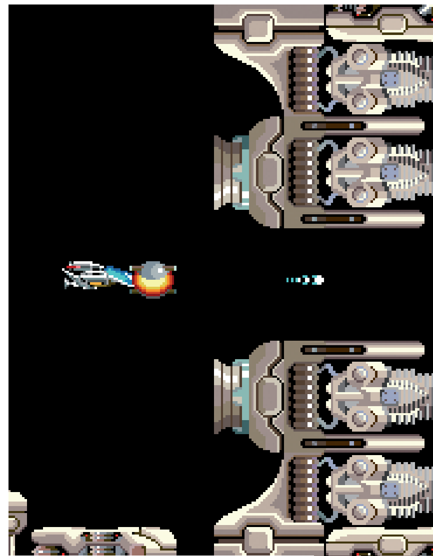


A DIFFERENT TYPE

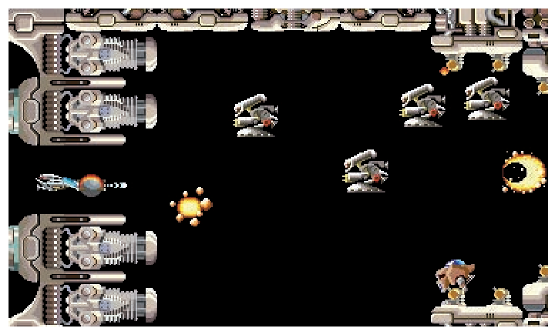
The third game set in the *R-Type* universe saw a huge departure for the series. With a deceptive title, *Armed Police Unit Gallop* (aka *Cosmic Cop*), and no splash screen to tie it and the *R-Type* series together, many fans are unaware that the two games are even connected. In *Armed Police Unit Gallop*, the player assumes the role of a private security firm that is contracted to hunt and destroy machines that have been driven insane by the Bydo. It looks and plays quite a bit differently to *R-Type*. The streamlined R-9 is replaced with a tubby looking ship that resembles a set of bagpipes called R-11B Peace Maker. The action is also a lot faster, environments can be deformed and the special laser weapon replenishes and hones in on enemies automatically. Perhaps the most innovative mechanic in the game is the player could alter the scroll speed. Sadly, though, it really isn't a patch on *R-Type*. Perhaps that's why Irem chose not to openly connect it to the franchise.



» **Above:** The first stage of R-Type really does help seperate the men from the boys.



» **Below:** The action in *R-Type* is unrelenting, but it's just so addictive you won't be able to put it down.



> "At the early stage of the R-9's planning, we wanted the ship to shoot up and down as well as front to back" KAZUMA ON THE R-9 FIGHTER

frigate – a boss so huge its mass stretched the entirety of the third stage, essentially playing the role of both level and boss. While this idea has since been copied by many games since *R-Type*'s release (*Contra III*, *Pulstar* and *Thunder Force III* being examples), the yellow and green Bydo gunship has always struck a chord with shoot-'em-up fans, and was later paid homage to by Irem in *R-Type Delta*.

"Actually, the ship was originally intended to be the final boss, and was designed as the 'moving base' of Bydo. We were keen to have players destroy the surface of this giant ship but at the same time we also wanted all players to enjoy this unique character, so the decision was made to bring it forward to Stage 3. I think Stage 5's boss, Bellmate, is the most interesting. It appears with so many masses of cells around it, which fly toward the player's ship one after another, and its attack pattern is unique. The player has to charge their shot to destroy it, and I also like the rhythm of its attack."

R-Type featured eight tortuous but wonderfully designed stages (unless you're playing the TurboGrafx 16 version, which was memorably split into two parts upon its initial release) and was famed for its unrelenting difficulty, despite the irony that its action, when put against its contemporaries, scrolls at a far more considered pace. Even *R-Type*'s first stage could prove a R-9 graveyard in inexperienced hands, but it was a combination of Irem's wonderful eye for design and *R-Type*'s compelling gameplay that kept gamers coming back for more punishment. But then *R-Type*'s mantra is not to try and clear each screen, or to rack up as many points as possible, but rather to try to and clear each stage.

"Because the game was originally developed for the arcade, we made the balance of the difficulty considering the players' achievement – based on how far somebody could get on a single credit [100 yen]. We also paid close attention to the changes that occur between each stage. The colours and themes change rapidly rather than gradually," explains Kazuma.

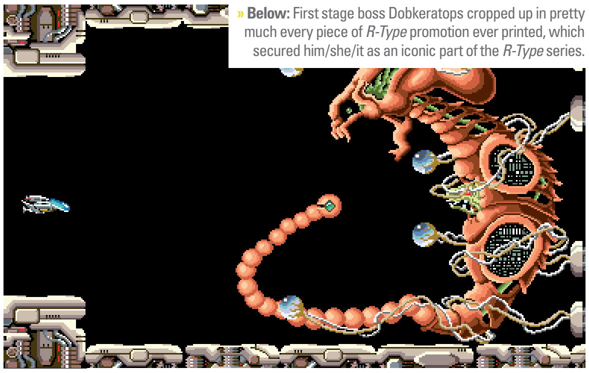
The Arrowhead R-9 fighter (the player's craft) has become one of the most iconic and well loved ships in the shoot-'em-up genre. Its lean and elegant body, ebbing into a peaceful-looking blue cockpit, is unarguably one of the most fondly remembered flying vessels in living memory, and has remained a firm fixture throughout the series. In its opening form, the R-9 is equipped with a Wave Cannon – a weapon that could be charged up by holding down the fire button and used to rocket a concentrated beam of energy towards the enemy. This alone fused a wonderfully simple risk-and-reward element to *R-Type*'s action, as players were forced to weigh up holding down the fire button to give them a devastating special attack or whittling down the many smaller threats to give your ship a bit more room to manoeuvre. Despite the R-9's iconic status within the franchise, Kazuma reveals that the Arrowhead R-9 fighter almost never made it into the videogame at all.

"In the beginning we actually considered a robot that could transform into a combat plane, but as the game developed, this idea gradually changed into the "Force" and disappeared. At the early stage of the R-9's planning, we wanted the ship to shoot up and down as well as front to back," Kazuma continues. "Initially, the ship could turn around and shoot backwards as it transformed into the robot, but the concept didn't work very well. It was then we realised that we could solve the problem using the Force."

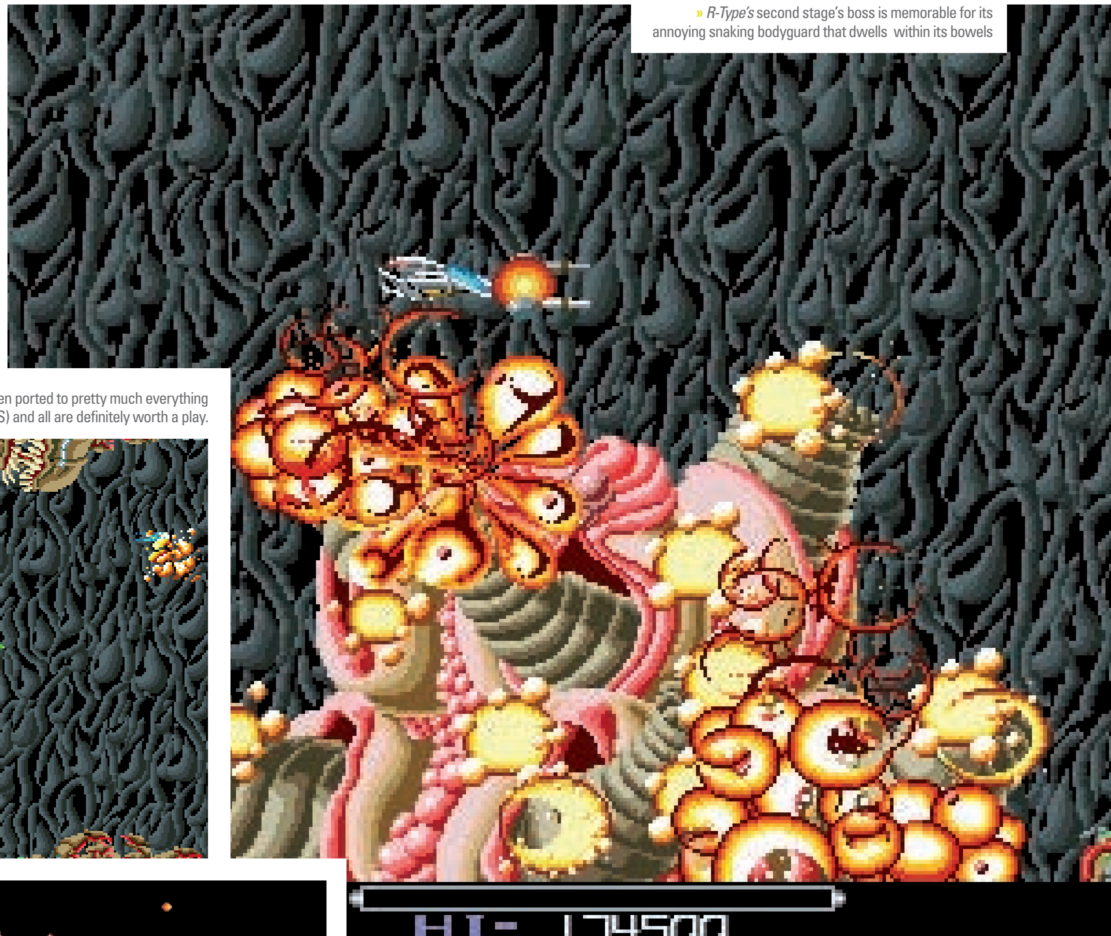
The Force, which took the shape of detachable power-up that could be attached to either end of your ship, proved another important mechanic that would ensure *R-Type*'s success in arcades and help

» **Below:** *Armed Police Unit Gallop* is a spin-off of the main *R-Type* franchise that now takes place across Earth's surface..

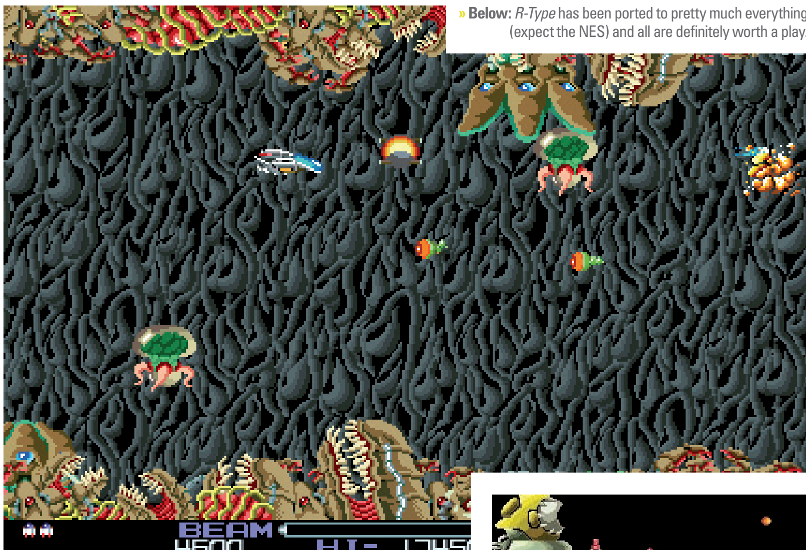




» **Below:** First stage boss Dobkeratops cropped up in pretty much every piece of *R-Type* promotion ever printed, which secured him/she/it as an iconic part of the *R-Type* series.



» *R-Type's* second stage's boss is memorable for its annoying snaking bodyguard that dwells within its bowels



» **Below:** *R-Type* has been ported to pretty much everything (expect the NES) and all are definitely worth a play.



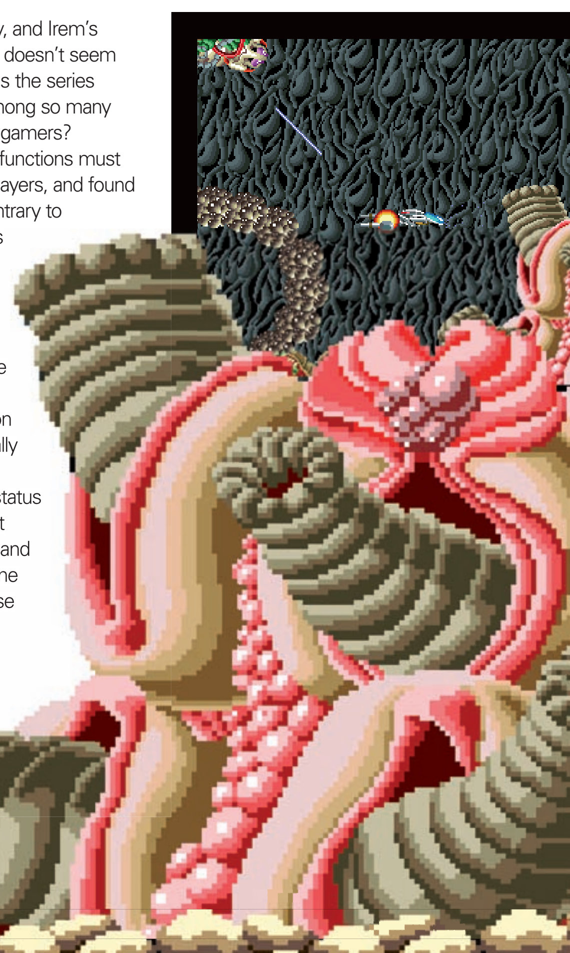
separate it from its peers. It was the player's only ally for the entire skirmish, and acted as weapon and shield – a power-up that would exponentially raise the fire and muscle power of the Arrowhead while also absorbing incoming enemy fire. But that wasn't all; players could also punch the Shield into the path of enemies, detach it to allow it to roam the play field, and use it to strategically switch between front and rear defence at the flick of a button. Skilled R-Typists quickly realised that progression would rely on their talent to effectively wield the Force and quickly worked out ways to use it to their advantage. Dobkeratops, for instance, can be easily dispelled by launching the Shield into its weak spot, rather than peppering it repeatedly with firepower. So how did the concept and idea for the Force come about?

"The Force was actually inspired by the ball-rolling Dung Beetle", reveals Kazuma. "Initially, it could be added to the top and underbelly of the ship – not just back and front, but we found the concept difficult to use, so we removed it. At that time, we were seeing so many shoot-'em-ups appearing from other publishers, we wanted to incorporate a dramatically unique power-up system into our game. We also spent a lot of time refining the specifications of the player's ship and the look of the enemies that appear at the beginning of the game."

The *R-Type* series has spanned an astonishing 21 years. And with the recent release of *R-Type Tactics*, which afflicts an even more considered pace to the series through turn-based combat, plus the forthcoming *R-Type* double pack, in the form of *R-Type* and *R-Type II* (essentially a HD reboot of *R-Type*s on the PSone), heading for Xbox Live, *R-Type*'s popularity, and Irem's fondness for the series, doesn't seem to be fading. So why has the series remained so popular among so many different generations of gamers?

"I guess some of the functions must have felt fresh for the players, and found it suited the game – contrary to everyone's expectations after playing it. Also, the control over the Force might look difficult but it really becomes interesting once you get used to using it," explains Kazuma. "In addition, maybe the variety and fun of learning the formation of the attacks, the game's setting, creature designs, and so on also helped. I think the reason why this game is eternally appealing is because its uniqueness never gets old."

The basis for *R-Type*'s legendary and revolutionary status becomes plainly obvious: it simply got every thing right the first time round. In its infancy, it led, revolutionised and shaped one of the most popular and seminal videogame genres ever. Boot *R-Type* up now and you'll soon realise that the game still holds up brilliantly today. It was innovative, stunning, a highly exigent masterpiece, and a phenomenon. And the ground it vociferously broke can still be felt, even today.



Retro Gamer would like to express a huge thank you to Kazuma Kujo and Irem for taking the time to speak to us.

R-TYPES

They say imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, and that can be no truer for *R-Type*. Irem's blaster tilted the shoot-'em-up genre on its head and, as is the way, clones followed as developers tried to capitalise on somebody else's triumph.



PULSTAR

» **SYSTEM:** ARCADE/NEO GEO
» **DEVELOPER:** AICOM
» **RELEASED:** 1995

The similarities between *Pulstar* and *R-Type* are so many that it led many people to mistakenly believe Aicom Co Ltd – the company responsible for this popular Neo Geo shooter – was derived by ex-Irem staffers. This, as far as we know, is simply a made up internet fact. We can tell you, though, that *Pulstar* is unarguably the most unabashed clone of *R-Type* you can come by. With a mossy-haired female pilot slotted inside a strikingly familiar craft to the R-9, you're given the choice to play through any of the game's four stages in any order. The first stage is set in space, the second is set underwater, the third on a fiery lava planet, and the final stage is a spin on the Bydo frigate stage in *R-Type*. Other similarities with *R-Type* include a Force-type shield (which can be fired at enemies but explodes in a shower of bullets instead of returning to the ship), very similar level layouts (particularly on the first stage), and familiar character and level designs.





LAST RESORT

» **SYSTEM:** ARCADE/NEO GEO
» **DEVELOPER:** SNK
» **RELEASED:** 1992

The *R-Type* influences in *Last Resort* are obvious but to give the game its credit it doesn't really feel like it's wholesaling from *R-Type* completely. For one, *Last Resort*'s design is more mechanical than biomechanical, with robots, tanks and spaceships manned by little army men who get comically pooped out of the top of the ships when they explode. The level designs also feel flat in comparison, with little going on in the backgrounds other than vast open space. *Last Resort* does prove a tough cookie to swallow, though, and the variation of the Force Shield doesn't feel as intuitive as *R-Type*'s, acting like a boomerang type weapon.





BLAZING STAR

» **SYSTEM:** ARCADE/NEO GEO
» **DEVELOPER:** AICOM
» **RELEASED:** 1998

Blazing Star is oft cited as the quintessential Neo Geo shoot-'em-up, and for good reason. It's absolutely brilliant. This sequel to *Pulstar* really does show off the capabilities of the machine and Aicom's (now under the name Yumekobo) talent for turning out epic feeling shoot-'em-ups. With a fleet of six individual-looking ships, each with their own attributes and weaponry, the game immediately has you thinking it's brilliant. Only one of the ships you can control actually has a Force-type shield, and that's balanced out by it having the weediest beam weapon you'll see in a videogame, ever. All the ships do have a variation of the Wave Cannon, however, and some can charge up their beam meter quicker than others. With a signature look and a hectic pace reminiscent to Cave shooters, *Blazing Star* won't fail to dazzle.



XEXEX

» **SYSTEM:** ARCADE
» **DEVELOPER:** KONAMI
» **RELEASED:** 1991

This great, but insanely difficult shooter from Konami melds elements of *Gradius*, *R-Type* and *Fantasy Zone* in one neon-soaked package. *Xexex* burrows *R-Type*'s biomechanical theme, and uses it to good effect. Many of the steely robots and armoured ships contain a protected weak spots that resemble fish eggs, and aiming for an enemy's caviar reserve is strongly recommended. *Xexex* also has vertical and horizontal scrolling and has its own version of the Force Shield. The spider-like sentient Flint, as it's known, feels like it takes precedent over the ship you control in the game. Your ship, for instance, called the Flintlock, feels pathetically whimpering when it's not coupled to the powerful device. Like in *R-Type*, the Flint can be fired and called back with a fire button tap, but, unlike the Force, will automatically try and grab enemies with its pincers.



KATAKIS

» **SYSTEM:** COMMODORE 64
» **DEVELOPER:** RAINBOW ARTS
» **RELEASED:** 1988

Katakis is one of the earliest and best *R-Type* clones that almost never was. Such was the similarities of both games, an injunction was served on its creators, Electronic Arts. An act that famously caused issue 42 of *Zzap!64* to hit the shelves a week late because of a cover tape. As a game in its own right, though, *Katakis* is certainly technically impressive. There's some lovely parallax scrolling on show here, and its C64 heritage is certainly up there with the likes of *Armalyte* and *Slamander*. It's also lengthy – there's an astonishing 12 levels – and it boasts a brilliant co-op mode. In a stroke of genius, *Katakis* creators allowed a second player to control the game's Force-like power-up, which added a really nice team dynamic to the game. As well as sharing a similar look to *R-Type*, your ship is also fitted with a chargeable Beam weapon. It might a blatant *R-Type* clone, but *Katakis* is still a wonderfully playable shoot-'em-up.



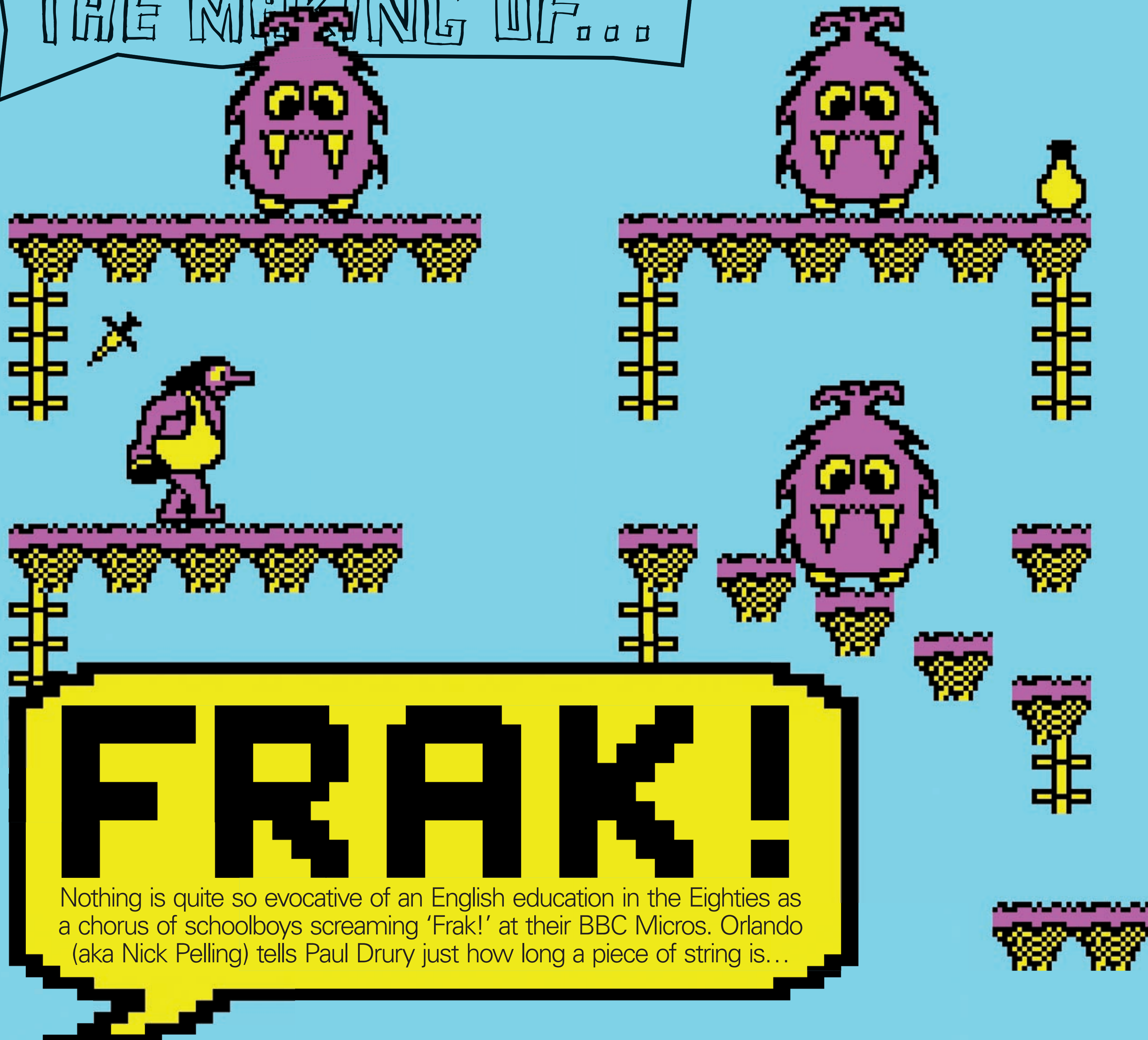
WHIP RUSH

» **SYSTEM:** MEGA DRIVE
» **DEVELOPER:** VIC TOKAI
» **RELEASED:** 1990

Whip Rush – or *Whip Rush 222AD: The Invasion Of The Voltegians* to give it its full title – was an *R-Type*-insipid shooter released on the Mega Drive. With its softer, more cartoon styling – it had an almost *Fantasy Zone* look – it's clear that *Whip Rush* is a very loose *R-Type* clone. The most blatant similarity is the ship you control in the game. The vessel in *Whip Rush* kind of resembles a cross between the egg-shaped Opa-Opa and *R-Type*'s R-9 Fighter. Other similarities between the two games include a pod-like power-up, which can be collected and bolted onto your ship, and a nice play on the Wave Cannon dynamic that affects the speed of your craft. The game features both vertical and horizontal scrolling sections and also feels pretty nippy, thanks to the action pelting by at a frantic pace.

THE MAKING OF...

FRAK!



Nothing is quite so evocative of an English education in the Eighties as a chorus of schoolboys screaming 'Frak!' at their BBC Micros. Orlando (aka Nick Pelling) tells Paul Drury just how long a piece of string is…

IN THE KNOW



» **PUBLISHERS:** AARDVARK SOFTWARE

» **DEVELOPER:** ORLANDO M PILCHARD QC AKA NICK PELLING

» **RELEASED:** 1984

» **GENRE:** SCROLLING YO-YO PLATFORMER

» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £2

"It was the end of the world!" exclaims Nick Pelling, rather dramatically. "There was a widespread belief that the bubble was about to burst and it would be the end of the home computer games industry. I wanted to do something completely different before we reached the end of the line. Something cut from a different cloth."

And in 1983, yo-yo wielding cavemen were not your usual game hero material. At this point, however, Nick, who'd cut his coding teeth on the BBC Micro with *Arcadians* and *Zalaga*, decent clones of *Galaxian* and *Galaga* respectively, had a vague collection of ideas rather than something set in the Stone Age.

"There were a whole load of things important to me at that time," he explains. "I wanted it to be non-violent. I wanted it to have an arcade feel but in a soft way, and I wanted a human aspect; some kind of human drama to play out. Something that reflected my life. A very British sort of thing but without being too parochial. Britsoft, done my way. I had all these qualities in my mind but couldn't see how I was going to achieve it."

Thankfully, Nick was not alone in his quintessentially English approach to game design. His friend and future coding collaborator Ian Boffin had drawn up plans for *Jungle Trouble*, his take on a long-forgotten arcade game, which would form the basis for what became *Frak!*

"The hero had a club in Boff's original notes," recalls Nick. "I didn't like that. I still wanted the non-violent thing. As a kid, I'd liked yo-yos, so why not give him that? Every writer relates to the hero. So, no, yo-yos weren't invented by cavemen, although they were used in the Philippines as a weapon of war. Except they didn't come back…"

And Nick's yo-yo certainly did. It might have seemed an unlikely weapon of choice, but the whole play mechanic of holding



» The high score table. PAM did the admin for Aardvark Software and CAP was Nick's dad, trivia fans.



» The self-confessed 'B-Team' rather frakked it up…

down the fire button to determine the length of string caveman Trogg would flick forth to repel missiles and adversaries introduced an interesting strategic element. The longer the string, the further his reach, but the greater risk of being caught with your yo-yo out and being cut down to size by a flying dagger.

With the prehistoric protagonist armed and almost dangerous, the levels began to evolve around him. Nick created a shape-editing program, allowing him to load, flip, and alter graphics for the game. Platforms and ladders were mapped out in pixels and those distinctive enemies were brought to life (see boxout 'Monster Mash-Up'). The summer of '83 saw development change direction as Nick relocated to Manchester to begin his degree in maths and philosophy and the project was given new legs. Literally.

"I wanted to get Trogg's legs animating nicely," says Nick, "but I hadn't much memory to play with. I thought: 'I know, I'll just draw someone's legs from life and bolt them on.' As you do. I needed a model. I was staying in Cornbrook House in Manchester and because I had been so busy doing *Zalaga* and starting *Frak!*, when I got there, all the half-decent rooms were gone and I got a shitty one at the end. A corridor room, which basically means there's a door in your room to someone else's room. A guy called Richard Boulter lived there and they're his legs. I made him walk very slowly while I sketched them. For days after, he couldn't walk properly, he was so tied up in the idea of watching himself walk. I don't think he liked what he saw…"

Nick did, though, and Trogg's ambling gait looked striking against those colourful backgrounds. "I used the BBC's Mode 1, which had nice square pixels but only four colours. A limited tonal range but I rolled with it and made a bold choice off the bat."

The gaudy cyan of the opening level, along with the sweet touch of making the platforms spell out 'FRAK', distinguished the game from its more sombre peers, as did the humour of the speech bubble expletive that accompanied Trogg's misadventures, giving the game its memorable title.

"Daryl Craig-Elliot came up with *Frak*," chuckles Nick. "I'd employed him to work on *Zalaga*. His friend Sarah used to say 'frik frak frok' when she got annoyed. It tickled him and I liked it too. Plus a school friend's mother said heroes' names should be short, percussive, and end in K. I used it for the world rather than the hero, of course…"

And many of us would use it with feeling while playing, too. *Frak!* has an unnerving ability to make you curse out loud, whether finding yourself halfway up a ladder, caught between a balloon and a hard place or misjudging a jump and plummeting to an untimely end. Even those raised on 8-bit difficulty spikes will find it a stern challenge. "Difficulty testing is one of the hardest things in games," acknowledges Nick. "It's easy to write play mechanics, but making sure they're not too easy but not too hard is one of those things you either have a feeling for or you don't. And if you don't have that, you should get someone else to tweak the difficulty curve. Where the player is on that curve and where it's going is how closely they identify with the game. I think we got it about right for the time it was released."

Those were indeed tougher times, but what is undeniable is that even through the profanities, players were hitting restart. *Frak!* has that 'one more go' quality, something that Nick endeavoured to instil through careful level design. "I had a little editor, so I could move things around, like platforms and ladders, place them and save it… I just kept on trying things. You knew there were things you couldn't do – you had to be fair, give the player a fighting chance, and be clear what they needed to do next. You have to be kind and unkind and transparent all at the same time."

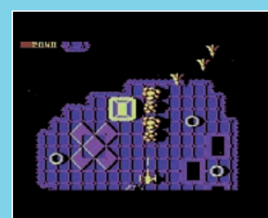
It's not easy for a game designer to get the mix right, but Nick did a fine job in

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

ARCADIANS
SYSTEM: BBC MICRO
YEAR: 1982

FIRETRACK (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: BBC MICRO, ELECTRON, C64
YEAR: 1987

3D POCKET POOL
SYSTEMS: GBA
YEAR: 2001



» Get your yo-yos out.





FRAK BACK

Nick explains his plans for not one but two sequels

"*Frak! 2* used an isometric perspective, which scrolled upwards. Trogg had been captured by Scrubblies and taken to their island. You were Trogg Jr on a skateboard with a boomerang. We had a pirate level, a forest level, and a ferry to the island planned, and between levels we had this little sign language tutor who gave you clues in sign language. Was it about disabled rights? No, just fun. I have a certain way of looking at the world and I like doing things that reflect my personality and culture without being parochial. We had test graphics, but for it to work, you would've needed a disk drive for the BBC and Acorn never sold enough – it just didn't make commercial sense."

"For *Frak! 3D*, I'd done some 3D rendering on the BBC – I really liked *I, Robot* – and then around 1986, I did some tests on the Archimedes. I had a little sprite of Trogg on a 3D block with a drop shadow. He's drawn and the rest of the world is polygon-rendered, so when you turn the whole world rotates. *Frak! 2* was very well-defined, but this was more conceptual. I did have lots of ideas for putting *Frak!* on the Amiga, too. For the backgrounds, I scanned some diagrams from a French engineering encyclopedia. A caveman in this technical drawing world… just too ambitious.'

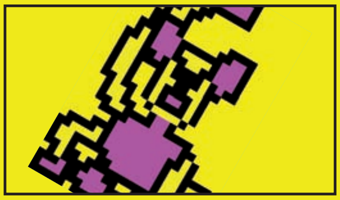
FRAK!

MONSTER MASH-UP

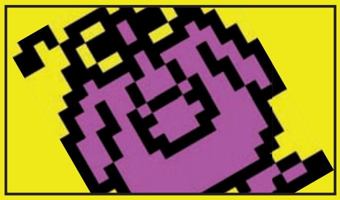
We take a look at the genesis of Frak's odd inhabitants



Scrubbly
Reminding us of one of the Wild Things from Maurice Sendak's seminal children's book, this fanged and feathered creature was created by Aardvark employee Daryl Greg-Elliot. His initials appear on the high score table. This is Nick's favourite, by the way.



Poglet
Is it a mad monkey? Is it the father of kids' punk TV presenter Pob? Actually, Nick kept this design in the family. "It was based loosely on my little sister; Poglet was her nickname. She was thin and worried and had kangaroo feet when she was born. She could fold up and touch her knees. Ectomorphic!"



Hooter
The result of a Blue Meanie getting jiggy with a Space Hopper on a Yellow Submarine, perhaps? "That's just a coincidence," Nick assures us. "I started with a big nose and went from there." Nothing to do with the chain of top-heavy bars either, then.

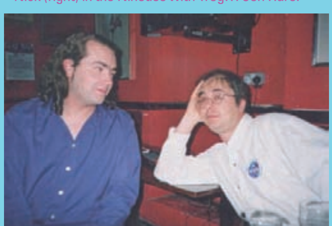


» Trogg prepares to unwind.

balancing risk and reward. Players had to mull over whether it was worth attempting those tricky jumps to collect all the gems on a level or if skipping down a series of platforms to grab a light bulb to up their precious seconds was worth the gamble – in a nice touch, if you run out of time, you don't die; the lights simply go out. Forward planning was essential in clearing the path ahead, as was knowing a few short cuts. "If you fall off the K on the first screen, you can collect the last key on your way down," winks Nick. "That was unintentional – I found it halfway along and liked it."

What sadly had to be left out were levels. Memory restrictions limited the layouts to three, but in some creative thinking, Nick extended the challenge by introducing a little visual trickery, forcing the player to revisit levels in the dark, with a distracting flashing effect, and even upside down. "Annoying, difficult… but fun," he smiles. "That's how I tackle anything. It's part of my personality."

» Nick (right) in the Nineties with Trog… Jon Hare.

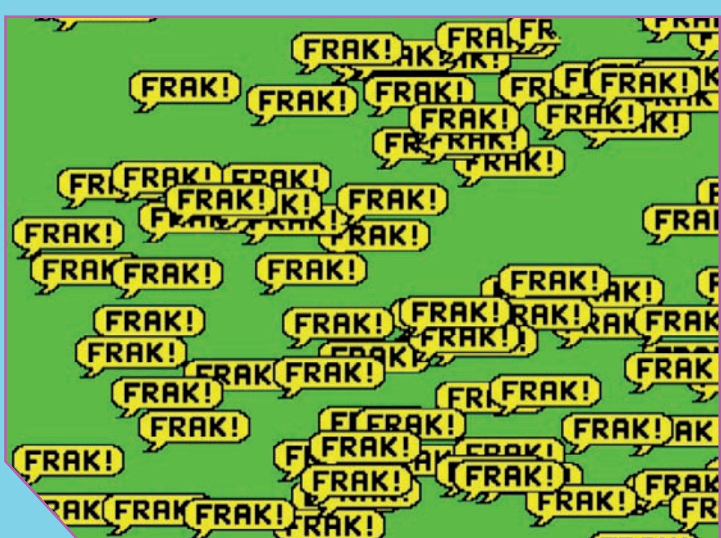


Nick poured more of his distinctive talents into the final *Frak!*, notably the catchy tunes that accompany each level. Having written a music program for Acornsoft, he found composing for the Beeb an easy pitch. "Level 1 is mine," he says, proudly. "I was learning to play bass guitar at the time. Level 2 is kind of the bass line for Peggy Lee's *Fever* and level 3 is my interpretation of *Alice's Restaurant*."

As Nick begins to whistle along to Arlo Guthrie's epic musical monologue, we broach the prickly subject of piracy. We wonder how dubious an honour it was to have written a game so mercilessly hacked… "Kind of flattering and rubbish at the same time," muses Nick. "I remember going to school fetes and seeing it playing. Interesting. I'd go back and check my mailing list to see if we had sold one within 50 miles of the place. No. People say it must have been the most-pirated game on the BBC. My friend Andy Davis collected seven or eight different cracked versions of *Frak!* He tried to show me the 'fuck' version but I decided I'd rather not. I could imagine."

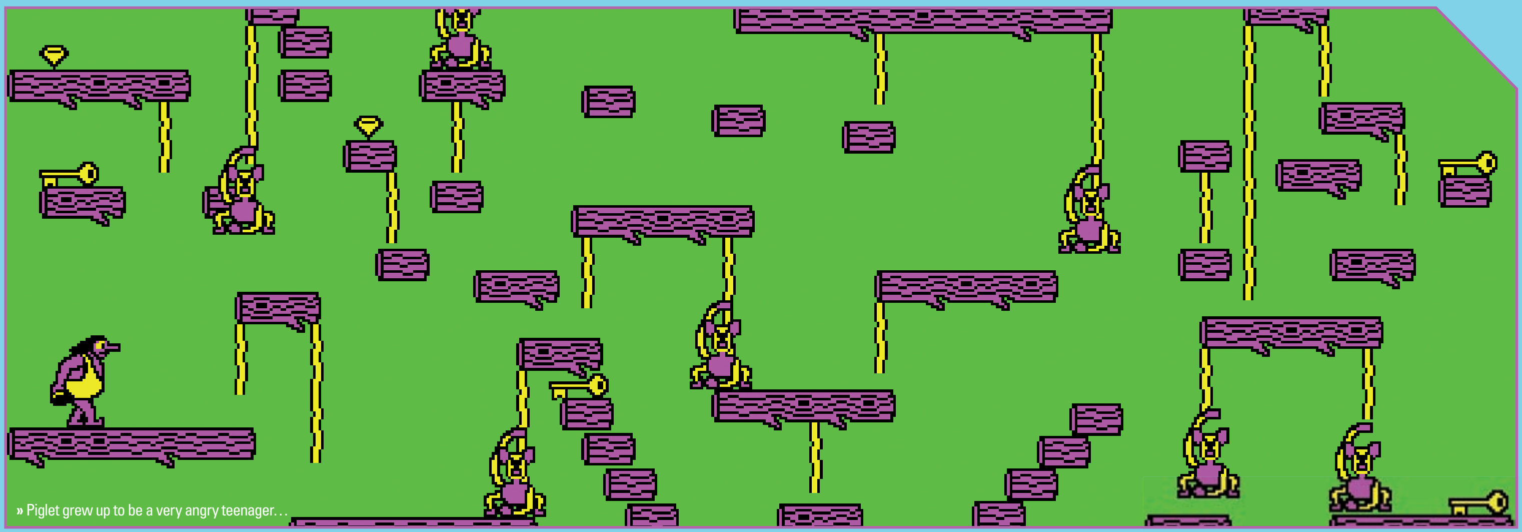
Yes, the infamously smutty hack, which not only had Trogg using the F-word in Ramsay proportions, it had him traversing levels in a permanently turgid state, and it left little to the imagination. Our Neanderthal hero was cast as 'the rapist' and the monsters were turned into an Ann Summers catalogue 'wife', a 'whore' obviously open for business and, most worryingly, a 'baby'. Tasteful.

Despite the proliferation of pirated copies, *Frak!* sold a very respectable 17,000 units after its release in the summer of 1984 and prompted Nick to convert the game for the Electron. Though the technical limitations of the machine forced him to opt for a monochrome look, it did allow more levels, increasing the number to nine. "It was a shame it had to be black and white, but it would have been too slow otherwise," sighs Nick. "I couldn't do colour tricks for later on in the game so I had to be clever about the levels and make them interesting



» Now this is just getting silly.





» Piglet grew up to be a very angry teenager…

but not too difficult. It had better collision detection too – pixel perfect!"

Another source of pride was the prescient decision to include a level editor, a regular feature of modern games, empowering players to create their own levels and swap them in mid-Eighties playgrounds. "Of course, you had to have a mate with an Electron, which was hugely unlikely," adds Nick, wryly. "Plus no one bought it. That's what I do. I'm ahead of the curve and have to wait for people to catch up."

He's smiling while he says this, folks; something he was also doing when one John Fletcher approached him about a team of his programmers converting *Frak!* for the C64. The fact that the coders had dubbed themselves The Bad News Team (later simply The B-Team), due to their tendency to begin any conversation with Fletcher with the phrase, 'bad news boss', should perhaps have served as a warning. "The 64 had smooth scrolling and sprites," notes Nick. "There was really no reason for it to be shit. I had no input. Actually there's a whole world of pain with that because not only was it not very good, I didn't get any money from it either. That was about the time when everything went down."

"WITH FRAK!, I WANTED TO DO SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT. SOMETHING CUT FROM A DIFFERENT CLOTH"

NICK ON WHY HE SWAPPED SPACESHIPS FOR YO-YOING CAVEMEN.

Unfortunately, the 'end of the games world', which had been the impetus for the innovative design of *Frak!* in the first place, had arrived. Distributors went out of business and with bills unpaid and stock unreturned, Aardvark also closed its doors.

Nick, however, remained in the industry, on and off, for the next 25 years, working on such diverse titles as *Firetrack*, *Bangkok Nights*, and *Duke Nukem 3D*. He's contemplated revisiting his prehistoric roots several times (see boxout 'Frak Back'), most recently toying with the thought of Trogg going mobile. "I had the idea of letting you design levels on your phone and send them to your friends, linking them together with some kind of *Frak!* hypertext language into huge levels, with photos embedded," explains Nick, demonstrating his usual left-field thinking. "But if you actually look how mobile phone technology and the industry structure works, most of it is still in the Stone Age."

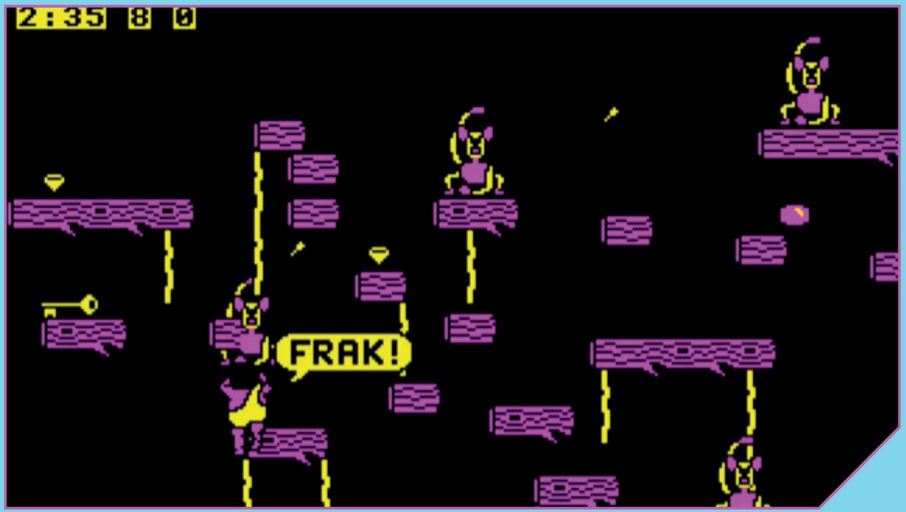
An apt choice of words, indeed. Let's hope that one day, Trogg might find a suitable cave and can charm us once more with his yo-yo-ing antics. Nick certainly retains a great fondness for his prehistoric platformer. "It's not a piece of shit," he states, confidently. "It wasn't really my take on an arcade game – it has a different pattern entirely. It's easy to fall back on explosions and I didn't want that. Or death. You hit a Scrubbly and they fly off-screen. No one dies. It's not Hollywood." He pauses, as if breathing in warm beer and cricket. "It's cream tea with the vicar's wife. A kind of cultural thing."

Makes you proud to be British…





» Trogg was never size zero, but on the 64 he really let himself go.



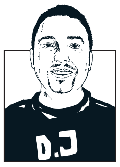
» They say it changes when the sun goes down…

BUBBLES

MAKING CLEANING FUN



- **PUBLISHER:** WILLIAMS
- **RELEASED:** 1982
- **GENRE:** PUZZLE
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** ARCADE
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £450+



HISTORY

I've never been one for tidying things up. Indeed, I'm a firm believer of the "do a crap job so your wife never asks you to do it again" way of thinking, which has now gotten me out of everything from hoovering the lounge to washing the car. For some reason, though, I'm totally transfixed by Williams' *Bubbles,* which is all about keeping your kitchen sink as clean as possible.

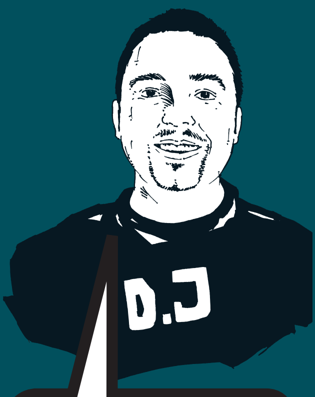
Taking control of a tiny bubble, you're simply required to move around the messy sink and collect up all the dirt before it's sucked up into the drain. Small ants patrol the interior of the basin, but can be safely absorbed by your bubble, which will in turn slowly increase its size. Crumbs and greasies can also be safely picked up and will not only increase your bubble's diameter, but also act as a signifier for the end of each stage – once everything has been cleaned up the sink flashes green indicating that it's safe to drop down it and continue your quest for cleanliness. Go down too early, however, and you'll simply end up losing one of your precious lives.

Realising that simply clearing stuff up on its own doesn't really make for much of a game, Williams also included a number of objects for the player to avoid on each stage, which ranged from deadly razor blades to giant ants that would climb out of the drainpipe and immediately home in on your seemingly defenceless little blob. While the razor blades were impervious to your bubble's skin, it was possible to defeat ants by collecting the brush that occasionally appeared and sweeping them up (although tight collision detection meant you had to line it up just so).

Despite its relative simplicity, no home versions of *Bubbles* appeared until *Williams Arcade's Greatest Hits* appeared on the PC, Saturn and PlayStation. It's since popped up on *Midway Arcade Treasures* but it remains a relatively rare curio that few people seem to remember. What a pity.







This past Christmas has seen an insane number of classic franchises resuscitated for the next-gen systems. Some are a world away from the originals we enjoyed in our youths, while others appear to have had little more than an aesthetic makeover. Here's a selection, then, of some of the very best and worst that we've been playing over the past few months.

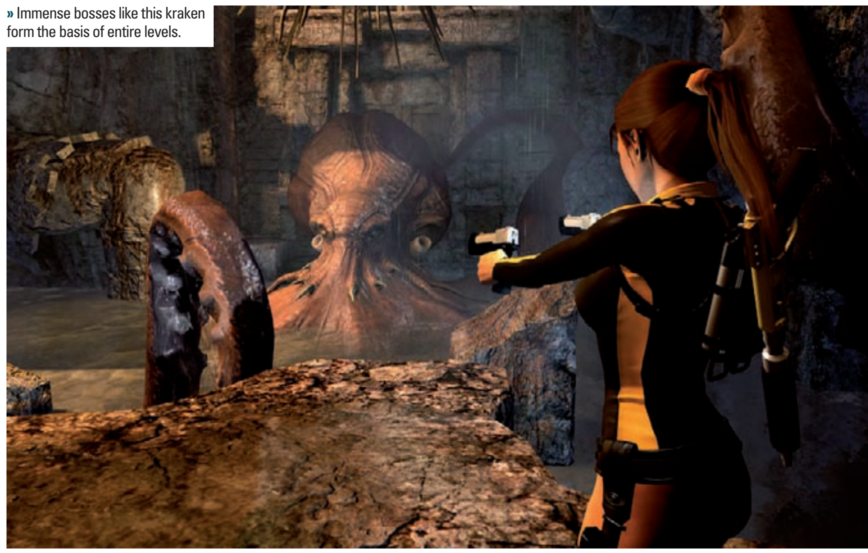


» Fighting dangerous animals once again comes to the forefront in *Underworld*, with tigers being particularly nasty opponents.



» Levels look absolutely glorious, and Lara herself has never moved with so much style and grace. It's a shame the gameplay isn't up to the same standard.





» Immense bosses like this kraken form the basis of entire levels.

INFORMATION
- » **PUBLISHER:** EIDOS
- » **FORMAT:** PS3, XBOX 360
- » **COST:** £49.99

TOMB RAIDER: UNDERWORLD

Lara's last couple of adventures have been something of a mixed bag on the next-generation formats. While *Legend* was a pleasing return to form and saw new developer Crystal Dynamics focusing more on the adventuring that Lara participated in and not her clothing, *Anniversary* was a stodgier retreading of the original game that certainly had its moments but felt a little rushed.

The same can be said for the English rose's latest adventure, for it is arguably her shortest yet. While many will point out that there's nothing wrong with a brief playing time providing the game itself is perfectly enjoyable, we were expecting something a little longer-lasting than what we ended up with. Having said that, the huge, cavernous, and stunningly beautiful locations that Lara gets to explore mean that it's going to take a fair while before you discover every last secret that *Underworld* has to offer.

Going back to the original game, Crystal Dynamics has put the focus in *Underworld* firmly on exploration and puzzle-solving, and while there's still a fair amount of combat, it's nowhere near as tiresome or fiddly as it was in *Legend* and *Anniversary*. It's the puzzle-solving that we've most enjoyed, however, and while the included conundrums aren't quite as grand or as clever as those of the original PlayStation and Saturn game, there are still plenty of moments that will have you scratching your head until you get to that inevitable eureka moment. Granted, some of the puzzles are a little flimsy in their execution and they all effectively revolve around finding items and switches to open doors, but they're still a good level above those of past games and ensure there's more to *Underworld* than its admittedly pretty visuals.

While we couldn't give a damn about the way Lara now looks realistically wet when she exits water, or how her clothes get subtly muddier as her adventure progresses, there's no denying that *Underworld* is a very pretty-looking game. The exotic environments are full of detail, while the many foes she has to dispense are beautifully animated and move about with a realism befitting a next-generation engine. Lara herself is no slouch in the athletic department and is particularly graceful as she swings, jumps, and climbs around the brilliantly detailed levels.

Lara's latest escapades may be a classic return to her adventures of old, but there are still worrying niggles that stop *Underworld* from being the sensational return to form that many have been proclaiming. The 3D camera is still as painfully annoying as it was back in 1996; the included motorcycle sections, while handling slightly better than they did in *Legend*, are still painfully monotonous; and the enemy AI is at times completely atrocious, with Lara's two-legged foes offering little to no challenge.

Crystal Dynamics has proven that it's definitely the right studio to take Lara to new heights. We were just expecting her much-touted return to form to happen a little more quickly than it so far has. That's all.

82%







SONIC UNLEASHED

INFORMATION

» **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
» **FORMAT:** PS3, XBOX 360, WII
» **COST:** £35.99 - £45.99

If Hollywood has taught us anything, it's that lycanthropy can go one of two ways. You can either have the *Teen Wolf* type, where the act of transforming into a slavering wolf hound will grant you popularity, notoriety, and the attentions of a materialistic girl, or you can have the *American Werewolf In London* type that turns you into a life-destroying monster. The former, sadly, is the variation that Sonic the Hedgehog has found himself contracting in his latest outing.

Owing to a plot involving Robotnik and some dodgy Chaos Emeralds, Sonic discovers he transforms from a sprightly hedgehog into a lumbering werewolf, with retractable claws, whenever night falls. Playing out like a poor man's *Devil May Cry* but void of any kind of flair or excitement, it's these 'werehog' sections that prove the real problem with the game. They are an awkward mix of frustrating platform sections peppered with laborious hack-and-smash beat-'em-up fights where Sonic has to fight robots and possessed flora. Not quick, not exhilarating, and certainly not *Sonic*.

The Sonic sections, however, are actually quite enjoyable and prove that a great *Sonic* game very almost existed behind all the werewolf gimmickry and fighting lunacy. All the time that you're steering the blue blur through the game, the music, the colours, the wistfulness from the 16-bit glory days return to you, and that's when the game really starts to work well. These levels are by far the best sections in the game and are perhaps the best stab, so far, at recreating the rush and nostalgia of classic *Sonic* in a 3D world. It's just a real shame these sections are few and far between. You always feel like you're being forced to put the leg work in to actually get to the good stuff, as it were.

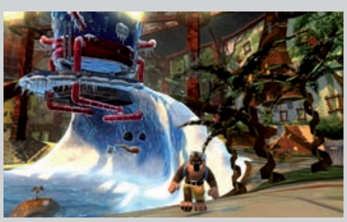
What you have here are glimpses of a really great *Sonic* game that very forgiving *Sonic* fans may get a bit of enjoyment out of.

For the rest of us, this is a simply yet another *Sonic* game spoiled by this need to mess with the franchise via perfunctory gimmickry. It's a shame, because we were really hoping that *Sonic Unleashed* would prove a real return to form for the venerable hero.

66%

BANJO-KAZOOIE: NUTS & BOLTS

» **PUBLISHER:** MICROSOFT » **FORMAT:** XBOX 360 » **COST:** £44.99

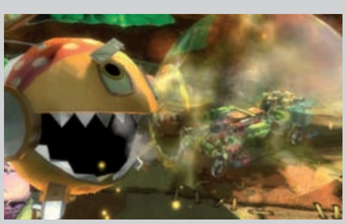


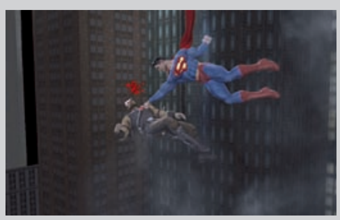
Banjo and Kazooie's latest adventure definitely doesn't follow the platform traditions that were so prevalent in Rare's two N64 releases, but don't let that put you off. While the focus is now on creating vehicles to complete a variety of highly enjoyable, if eventually repetitive, mini-games, there's more than enough of the old *Banjo* elements on offer to ensure that fans will be more than happy with the bear and bird's third home outing.

Stunning to look at and achingly funny in places, *Banjo* boasts excellent gameplay, genuinely lovable characters, and a game world that begs you to explore every last nook and cranny. It's also typically Rare and should easily silence those who still argue that the Twycross-based studio is a sorry shadow of its former self.

Nuts & Bolts not only proves that Rare is still on perfect form but also stands as an example of how to take a classic franchise and give it a much-needed freshening up. If only the developers of some of the other games we reviewed on these pages this month had been prepared to do the same thing…

87%



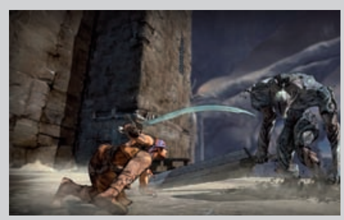


MORTAL KOMBAT VS DC UNIVERSE

» **PUBLISHER:** MIDWAY
» **FORMAT:** PS3, XBOX 360
» **COST:** £39.99

***Mortal Kombat* has** struggled to find its feet since moving to 3D, and this latest effort, despite an impressive roster, is no different. While there's fun to be had from beating up the likes of Batman and Superman, the clunky combat feels archaic when up against the slickness of brawlers like *Soul Calibur IV* and *Street Fighter IV*. It's not a total disaster, but the genre has long since moved on, leaving Midway's bloody brawler bruised and defiantly battered.

51%



PRINCE OF PERSIA

» **PUBLISHER:** UBISOFT
» **FORMAT:** PS3, XBOX 360
» **COST:** £49.99

It's been a serious case of diminishing returns for Ubisoft's *Prince Of Persia* franchise, so it's rather pleasing to discover that this next-generation release is actually pretty good fun. It's certainly not up to the high standards of *The Sands Of Time*, but the fluid combat, flawless animation, and clever platform-based puzzles are definitely a step in the right direction. Let's just hope that the many annoying trial-and-error elements that Ubisoft has included don't appear in the predictable sequel.

79%

R-TYPE TACTICS

INFORMATION
» **PUBLISHER:** RISING STAR GAMES
» **FORMAT:** PSP
» **COST:** £29.99

The *R-Type* series has been renowned for its slow pace, but Irem's announcement that it would be taking the series into turn-based strategy realms really could be seen as slamming the brakes on the series.

Despite the new direction, we're sure that *R-Type* and strategy fans will not be disappointed with *Tactics*. Irem has ensured that what its game might lack in the out-and-out shooting action is certainly made up for in presentation, fan service and longevity. It has shaped a proficient strategy game that stays remarkably true to its source material, and while the game isn't without a few, but forgivable, issues – the initial training missions give little direction as to how to actually play the game and also feel just a shade too difficult to finish, and the action is frequently interrupted by excessive and intrusive combat cut-scenes that need to load – it does feel like plenty of care and attention has gone into making this transition feel as smooth as possible.

Fans will be pleased to know that this still feels very much like *R-Type*. All of the ships, backgrounds, power-ups, and weapons that appear in the game are carry-overs from previous games in the universe. The Force Orbs, for example, play a vital role in the action and can either be fitted to your R-9 units to power them up or used as a counter to ram enemy craft. And, in typical *R-Type* fashion, the game also throws in the odd boss fight, acting as a nice nod to those iconic moments in the series. Plus, for the first time ever, players can choose to play from the perspective of the R-9 Fighters or take the role of the nefarious Bydo Empire.

Irem can be commended for ably pushing *R-Type* into strategy realms. PSP owners looking for a solid, slick, and simple-to-grasp strategy game for their machine – and like their games at a protracted pace – will find a huge, approachable, and highly absorbing strategy game that most certainly lives up to its heritage.

81%







SOUL CALIBUR IV

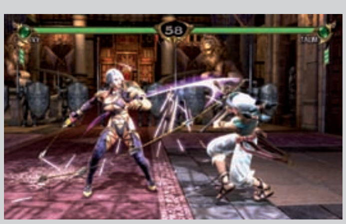
» **PUBLISHER:** UBISOFT » **FORMAT:** PS3, XBOX 360 » **COST:** £49.99



Take away the fact that the included *Star Wars* characters are little more than an excuse to wring as much money out of George Lucas fanboys as possible, and *Soul Calibur IV* proves itself to be a great addition to the popular fighting franchise. In fact, over the last few months we've actually been playing it more than the original *Soul Calibur*, and while Namco's first-born will still hold a special place in our hearts, we're now forced to admit that *IV* is the far better game – which is quite a revelation when you consider how disappointing *Soul Calibur III* was.

Combat is fast and fluid, with matches often going right down to the wire if you're against an evenly matched opponent, online play is surprisingly stable and lag-free, while the new non-*Star Wars* characters offer plenty of depth and balance while integrating nicely into the classic line-up. Add in loads of unlockable goodies, some glorious-looking visuals and fantastic, extremely operatic music, and this will keep you going for an age, or at least until *Street Fighter IV* appears. It's hardly going to matter once that one's in our hands…

86%





MONOPOLY

» **PUBLISHER:** ELECTRONIC ARTS
» **FORMAT:** XBOX 360
» **COST:** £39.99

EA's release of the popular board game makes us ask many questions. Why is Mr Moneybags so scary-looking? Why is this a full-price release when it would be more suited to the Xbox Live Arcade? Why hasn't it been localised for the UK market? And why, for the love of god, is there no online play?

There are definitely some nice touches in this latest edition of the classic game, but there just isn't enough here to justify the high price tag.

47%



COMMAND & CONQUER: RED ALERT 3

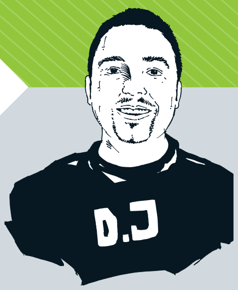
» **PUBLISHER:** ELECTRONIC ARTS
» **FORMAT:** XBOX 360
» **COST:** £39.99

There have been several RTS releases on the 360 over the last couple of years, and while *Red Alert 3* is let down by a control system that just isn't suitable for a pad, it's a great update of the classic franchise. It's also utterly absurd, with a ridiculous plot, a wonderfully hammy turn from Tim Curry, and some excellent new vehicles, squads, and buildings to control. It's been a long time coming, but this is a solid update that fans will lap up.

80%

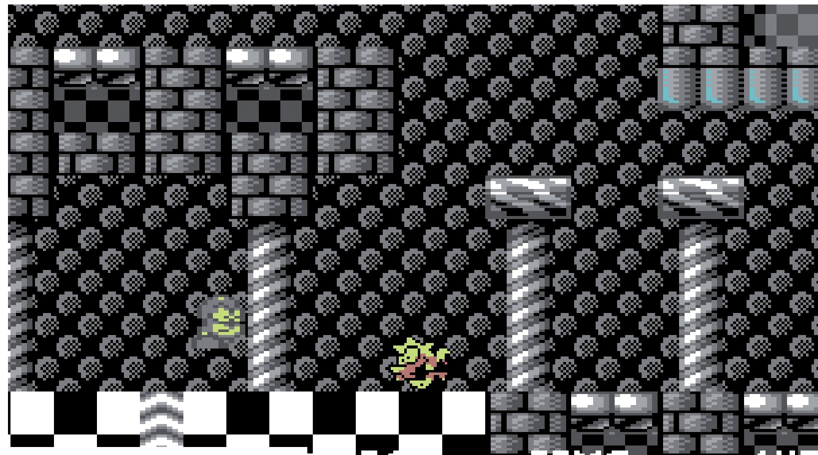
HOMEBREW

» The scene's latest news and reviews

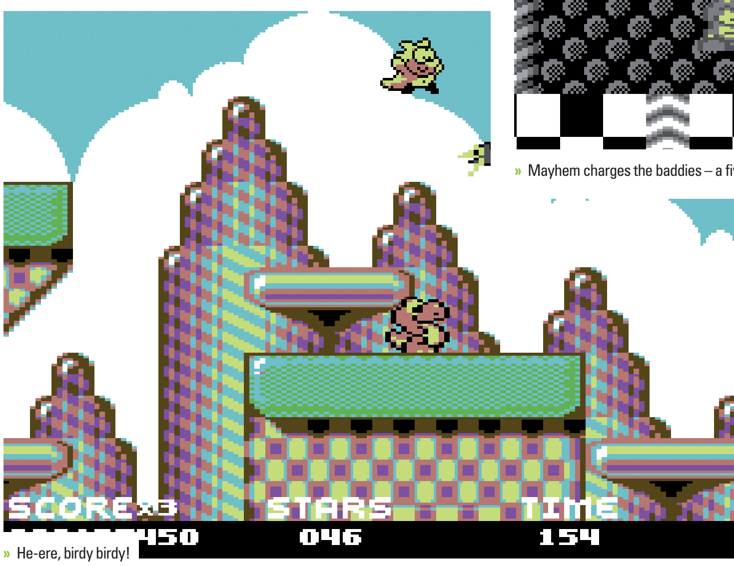


Crikey, it's been a busy month in the world of homebrew. Jason Kelk looks back at the 15-year edition of one of the greatest C64 platformers of all time, while we take a gander at some of our favourite entries from Retro Remakes' recent competition. To finish off, we catch up with Ovine Design's Trevor Storey and discover the rather addictive *Winter Bells*





» Mayhem charges the baddies – a fiver an hour!



» He-ere, birdy birdy!



» Catch a falling star and put it in your pocket.

THE LITTLE YELLOW DINOSAUR TURNS 15

MAYHEM IN MONSTERLAND



FORMAT: COMMODORE 64
DEVELOPED BY: APEX COMPUTER PRODUCTION
LINK: WWW.PSYTRONIK.COM
RELEASE DATE: 2008
PRICE: £8.99 (TAPE OR DISK) OR £12.99 (DELUXE DISK)
REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK

Poor Mayhem the little yellow dinosaur has been given a mammoth task: Monsterland is a complete mess because well-meaning apprentice dino wizard Theo Saurus accidentally sapped all of the joy from the place, leaving the lands grey and populated with cute but less than friendly creatures. As one of the few remaining splashes of colour about the place, Mayhem is given the job of disposing of those vile beings and restoring harmony. Each of the five worlds that make up Monsterland starts off sad, with lots of dark colourings and bursts of lightning illuminating the sky, so Mayhem's first task is to get his claws on bags of magic dust carried by some of the new inhabitants. This is achieved initially by jumping on their heads or, when the correct power-up has been collected, using the charge feature to nose dive through them at speed.

Once a quota of bags has been amassed, they need to be taken to Theo Saurus – who was presumably hiding at the local library – and he, in turn, distributes the dust to return the current stage to its previously happy state. Once the place is a bit more cheerful, Mayhem returns to it, gathering the happy magical stars that the dust leaves as a residue – again, some of which are carried by creatures and require a stomping or charging to liberate – before making a dash for the level's finishing line to progress to the next stage.

Originally self-published in 1993 by developers John and Steve Rowlands, who had previously worked on both *Creatures* and *Creatures II* for Thalamus, *Mayhem In Monsterland* was a major high point during the C64's commercial swan song. Soon after *Mayhem* slid to a halt on our screens the full-price C64 software market did something similar, leaving the budget houses and mail-order publishers carrying the torch. So when Jason Mackenzie resurrected his own mail-order publishing label Psytronik in 2008, one of his first thoughts was to contact the Rowlands boys about the possibility of giving *Mayhem In Monsterland* a second outing.

After a little wrangling, a bit of re-mastering work, and the repair of the long-standing lives counter bug, an arrangement was reached and this fifteenth anniversary edition is the result.

The game itself still looks amazing, even after those 15 years, and that's down to a couple of brave design choices; some background graphics and sprites use mixed colours, which never quite work under emulation, the incredibly fast scrolling relies on an undocumented 'feature' of the C64, the music dynamically alters during play, and the controls are intuitive and responsive despite cramming what would usually need three buttons on a console into a standard single-button joystick. When *Mayhem In Monsterland* was originally released *Commodore Format* declared the game perfect, giving it an overall score of 100% and, while there is a degree of hyperbole to that declaration, it was and indeed still is a superb game and one of the finest examples of the genre released for the C64.

94%

NEW GAMES NEEDED

If you have a homebrew project you would like to see featured then please contact us at:
retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk

MOCKATETRIS

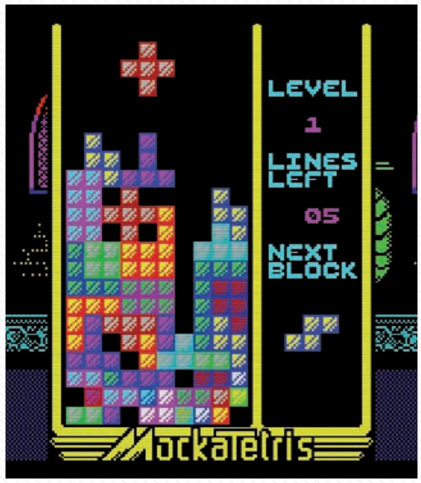
REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK

» **FORMAT:** SPECTRUM » **DEVELOPER:** RAFAL MIAZGA
» **DOWNLOAD:** WWW.WORLDOFSPECTRUM.ORG/INFOSEEKID.CGI?ID=0021863

Although one of the most heavily trodden indie game paths, *Tetris* can still make for a great game. *Mockatetris* starts off rather attractively since, along with the in-game graphics themselves, each stage features a mock-up of a game such as *Wings Of Fury* that is revealed as rows are completed and removed. Sadly, when the game is played things begin to slip. For a start, some of the well-balanced *Tetris* shapes have been altered and new ones added, making the placing of these revised objects more difficult.

The control system doesn't help things either: pushing up rotates the current shape and down drops it rather than moving it faster while still allowing manoeuvring, but both of these controls are overly sensitive, with the rotation in particular being extremely fiddly to get right under pressure. With many fine examples of *Tetris* already available for the Spectrum, there really isn't anything to raise this one above the competition.

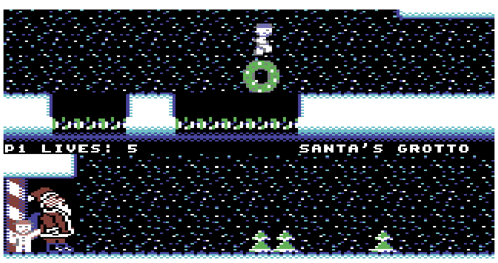
61%



» *Tetris* in the shadow of the beast.



» Anyone would think it was Christmas…



FROSTY THE SNOWMAN 2

REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK

» **FORMAT:** COMMODORE 64 » **DEVELOPER:** JOE DIXON
» **DOWNLOAD:** NONAME.C64.ORG/CSDB/RELEASE/?ID=74143

Frosty the Snowman was, apparently, a jolly happy soul, but considering his working conditions that's pretty hard to believe. Despite the snow coming down like a Christmas special, Santa has sent poor Frosty and his unnamed twin on a race to the Elves' cave to retrieve a prezzie, and first back is the winner. This contest takes place over a split screen, with hazards ranging from holes and falling icicles to bouncing Christmas puddings that need to either be ducked under or leapt over.

This isn't so much a sequel as a re-imagining of the original – published with a Christmas issue of *Your Commodore* – which took words like 'frustration' and 'difficult' to exciting, if somewhat scary, new levels. But while *Frosty 2* isn't exactly a walk in the snow-covered park either, it manages to be far more enjoyable by not being a total Grinch about collisions or placing hazards unfairly. Add to this more playable game a full graphical overhaul and a selection of jovial music and it's an uncomplicated but entertaining seasonal package.

83%

CLICK!

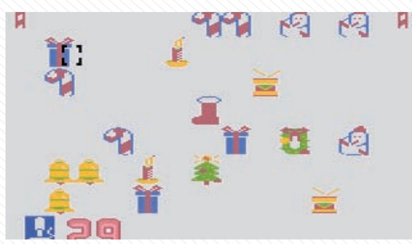
REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK

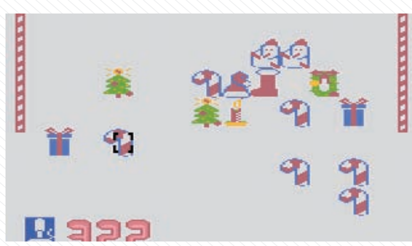
» **FORMAT:** ATARI 8-BIT » **DEVELOPER:** CHRIS MARTIN
» **DOWNLOAD:** ATARI.HOBBY-SITE.COM/GAMES/CLICK/

The objective of *Click!* is simple: the screen slowly fills with an assortment of Christmas-themed icons and, rather unsurprisingly, the player has to click them to clear spaces. Removing chains of similar icons increases the score multiplier and, if enough are removed within the time limit, the player moves on to the next stage. To complicate things, the icon at the centre of the screen is a 'poison pill' that regularly changes shape, and selecting either it or anything that it currently resembles will disable the player's cursor.

Cursor control can be with either a CX-85 numeric keypad, Atari ST mouse, light gun, Koala Pad, Atari touch tablet, or a standard joystick, with the latter requiring some acclimatisation due to its sensitivity. While the gameplay really is as simple as it sounds, *Click!* can also be entertaining and, indeed, engrossing to the point where 'just a quick game' can result in half an hour being unexpectedly consumed.

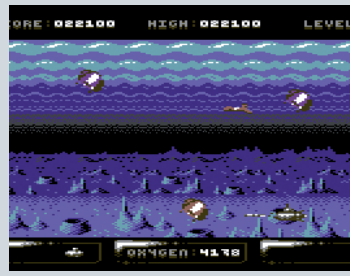
80%


» I felt your presents, Luke.



WHAT'S BREWING?

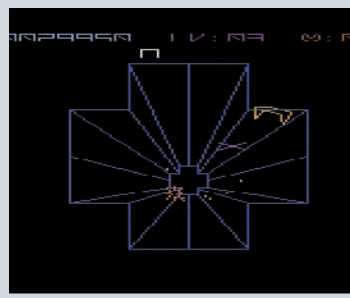
All the latest news from the homebrew community



» Down periscope!

Hunting for subs

After depth-charging a very respectable 90% back in **Retro Gamer** 57, the developers and **www.c64.com** made the disk version of aquatic shoot-'em-up *Sub Hunter* available for free download over Christmas. The full boxed version is still available from **www.psytronik.com** for those wanting the thrill of a new tape or disk through the post, but now everybody can try before they buy – or at least before the postman turns up with the package!


» *Tempest 2000* without having to own a Jaguar.

What's our vector, Victor?

Based on seminal vector-based blaster *Tempest* and taking some of its cues from Jeff Minter's superb Jaguar reworking, *Tempest Xtreem* for the Atari 8-bit is a new cartridge game developed by Atlantis Games Group that is about to be released through distributors Video 61 (**www.atarisales.com**). The impressive playable preview of *Tempest Xtreem* can be downloaded from **www.freewebs.com/kjmannmusic/tempest/tempdemo.zip**, and we're hoping to wade into battle with our superzappers charged in a couple of issues time.

What a load of rubbish!

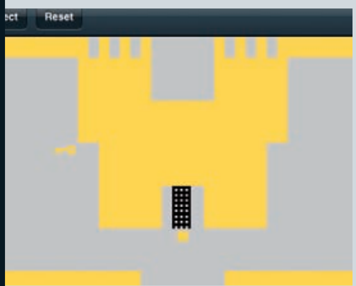
As the new year starts, so does the Comp.Sys.Sinclair Crap Games Competition 2009. Now in its fourteenth year, the CSSCGC is about Sinclair games that are deliberately crap, despite managing to produce the occasional enjoyable one. This unusual competition is at **alistairsserver.no-ip.org/public/cgc** and **reptonix.awardspace.co.uk/sinclair/csscgc2008/** houses the 2008 edition.

HOMEBREW

» The scene's latest news and reviews

WHAT'S BREWING?

All the latest news from the homebrew community



» *Adventure* gets a new lease of life through the iPhone.

» Another Adventure

Fans of the classic Atari 2600 game Adventure may be very interested to learn that it's recently been released on Apple's iPhone. Created by Peter Hirschberg, who previously released an open-source port on both the PC and Mac, it's a great little conversion that makes use of the iPhone's tilt feature to move your character around. Currently available as a free download from the App Store, it's a surprisingly fun little port that we've been really getting into. Expect a proper review in the very next issue when we do our very first iPhone round-up.

» Glow Sticks

The Atari 2600 joystick is easily one of the most iconic gaming peripherals around, but a member of website Instructables has found a brand new use for it. By turning the joystick into a lampstand, using the fire button as an on/off switch, and adorning the cover with a selection of artwork from classic 2600 games, the busy individual has created an amazing item that we now have to own no matter what the cost. It's been entered into a $20,000 competition that the site is running, so we wish him all the best.

FLASH BOREDOM



Want to know how to while away those boring office hours? Then don't miss out on **Retro Gamer**'s Flash game of the month. This month we look at **Winter Bells**

WE'VE BEEN PLAYING this charming game for ages now, but it still doesn't get boring. All you have to do is make your bunny jump on a never-ending supply of Christmas bells, hitting birds along the way. It sounds easy, but like the best Flash games it's horribly addictive and should come with a health warning. Download it from **www.ferryhalim.com/orisinal/g3/bells.htm**.

REMAKES WE'VE BEEN PLAYING…



EMPIRE STRIKES BACK

» **DOWNLOAD:** WWW.RETROREMAKES.COM

S.H

Developer Minionsoft is no stranger to the *Star Wars* universe and has already created a great remake of Atari's *Star Wars*, but this effort is, dare we say it, even better than that. Effortlessly capturing the spirit of the original arcade game, *The Empire Strikes Back* ups the graphics to a ridiculous degree but retains the gameplay that made the original arcade game so fun to play.

Some will no doubt prefer the generally cooler look of the wireframe original, but the remake still looks gorgeous in places and offers intricately detailed visuals that move along at a cracking rate. Add in some great gameplay, helped by the effortless use of the mouse, and Minionsoft has another stellar remake to add to its collection.



DIZZY: THE LOST ISLAND

» **DOWNLOAD:** WWW.PARKPRODUCTIONS.BTINTERNET.CO.UK

D.J

As much as we want to wax lyrical about any game that features a copy of **Retro Gamer** within its code, we can't help but be a little disappointed with *Dizzy: The Lost Island*. The biggest problem is that there's simply too much wandering around large, empty levels, which soon gets very boring. While these huge expanses have no doubt be included in order to include Dizzy's original roll, the island itself just isn't that interesting to explore. *The Lost Island* is also incredibly drab and lacks the cartoon vibrancy that was so obvious in the original 2D games, particularly the Amiga and Mega Drive efforts.

There's certainly some potential here and we'd love to see Park Productions persevere with the classic hero, but as it stands, this is far from eggshellent. Had to be done…

Remake of the Mouth





» *Deathchase* is ridiculously fast and you'll need Jedi-like reflexes on the later stages.

DEATHCHASE

» **DOWNLOAD:** WWW.RETROREMAKES.COM

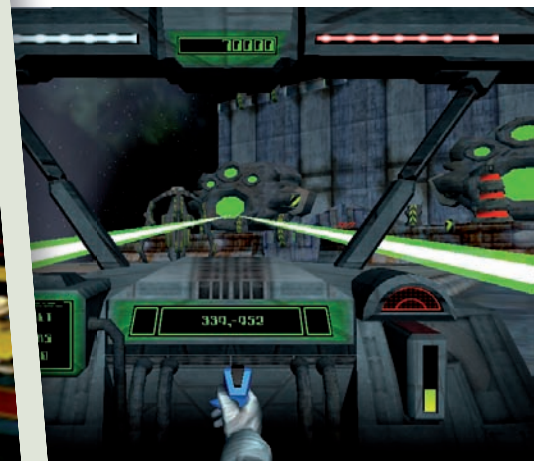
D.J

It's rare when we play a remake that we actually prefer to the original, but we may well have found our first serious contender. Like Park Productions' re-imagining of *Dizzy*, *Deathchase* isn't the most colourful of games that we've played recently and sports a dull colour palette that does little to capture the bright day-glo brilliance of the original Spectrum game. That's our only complaint, though, as this is gaming bliss that perfectly captures the insane speed and gameplay that made Mervyn J Estcourt's original so much fun to play.

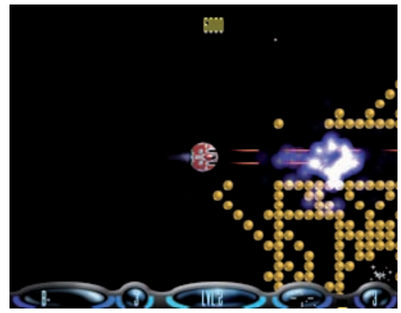
Controlled solely by the mouse, which works exceptionally well, by the way, developer James Kett scores instant brownie points by making your death-dealing machine a dead ringer for a Speeder Bike – which, let's face it, we all pretended to be riding in the original anyway. Easily as tough as Estcourt's outing, Kett throws a sneaky spanner into the works by including some excellent AI that persuades you to pursue them to your doom instead of simply picking out a safe route through the ever-thickening sea of trees that slowly envelops you.

Like Estcourt's version, death never comes through unfairness but simply because of your own greed. The original was one of the earliest advocates of 'risk and reward' gameplay, and Kett has captured this brilliantly. An utterly superb remake.









» **Above:** Ovine Design's excellent remake of *Driller* is worth a download.
» **Top Right:** *The Nameless* is bloody hard, but still great fun to play.
» **Right:** Blasting mayhem in the rather spiffy remake of *Hunter's Moon*

HOMEBREW HEROES

THIS MONTH'S HERO IS **TREVOR STOREY**, A TALENTED 3D ARTIST BY DAY AND A 2D WUNDERKIND BY NIGHT. THOUGHT THE WIZBALL REMAKE LOOKED AMAZING? THEN YOU HAVE TREVOR TO THANK

Retro Gamer: So Trevor, when did you first get involved in homebrew?
Trevor Storey: I've always been an artist so coding was always a big no-no for me. Thankfully I heard of, and then got hold of, The Games Factory and I started to create some very simple platformers with it. Once I'd got a little better with the program, I was actually able to create, with the help of Scottige, some pretty playable games. In fact one or two of them I still play today.

RG: What programs do you use and which is your favourite?
TS: Well, to begin with I would use The Games Factory. Once I began feeling a little more confident I eventually moved onto Multimedia Fusion, which is very similar to Games Factory but a lot more powerful.

Thankfully Stu [Collier] does the coding nowadays, so I can simply concentrate on the artwork and design of the games we work on. It's much easier asking for editors than trying to create one yourself, believe me.

RG: So when did you first get involved in the remake scene?
TS: It would have been around 2000. I've actually been involved in the games industry since the Eighties and I really missed working on 2D platformers and shooters. Around that time I'd been involved in *Shadow Man 1* and *2* for about four years, working in 3D creating the landscapes, and really wanted to have a bash at doing some good old-fashioned 2D stuff again. It's strange how much you really begin to miss the old style of game once it's been taken away from you.

RG: Is there any reason why you favour creating remakes over original games for the old systems?
TS: Simple answer really: I can't program for older systems and the art constraints are absolutely huge. I certainly wouldn't rule out doing some Commodore 64 games, though, if Stu ever decided to learn some C64 code. After seeing the impressive work that Endurion did on *Joe Gunn* it does whet the appetite somewhat.

RG: How long on average do most games take for you to complete?
TS: I would say an average of eight weeks, although some of the larger remakes have taken over a year to finish. The quickest I've ever been involved with was probably *Quantasm*, which took about two weeks.

RG: Which game are you most proud of and why?
TS: That's a tough one to answer. It's probably *The Nameless* because of the sheer size and the amount of stuff in there. Stu had to create a fair few editors for it and bug-testing was a long, very boring affair. I also have a soft spot for *Wizball*, *Driller*, *Total Eclipse* and *Hunter's Moon*.

RG: What remake do you wish you could have made and why?
TS: Everything we've wanted to remake we've done so far, although one of the ones we've started and not finished is *Stunt Car Racer Online*. Hopefully one day we'll get around to finishing it as it's shaping up nicely.

RG: How do you feel about the recent homebrew community that has appeared on Xbox Live Arcade?
TS: I think it's a fantastic idea, as it opens the door for fresh ideas. Bedroom coders have been crying out for something like this for years. We are looking into it and hopefully we'll get a few bits on there in the future.

RG: Have you ever had trouble from a developer over a game you've remade?
TS: Not really, no. We were contacted by one of the original creators and asked to remove the name, but that's all he asked and he had some kind words about our version. We did as asked and everyone was happy.

There have been others that have been asked to stop what they were doing, but on the whole I think most people feel pretty chuffed that someone has taken the time and effort to honour their old game with a modern remake.

RG: Why do you think homebrew coding remains so popular?
TS: Because it's a fun, cheap, and creative hobby where you get to meet some great people who feel the same as you. We all love creating.

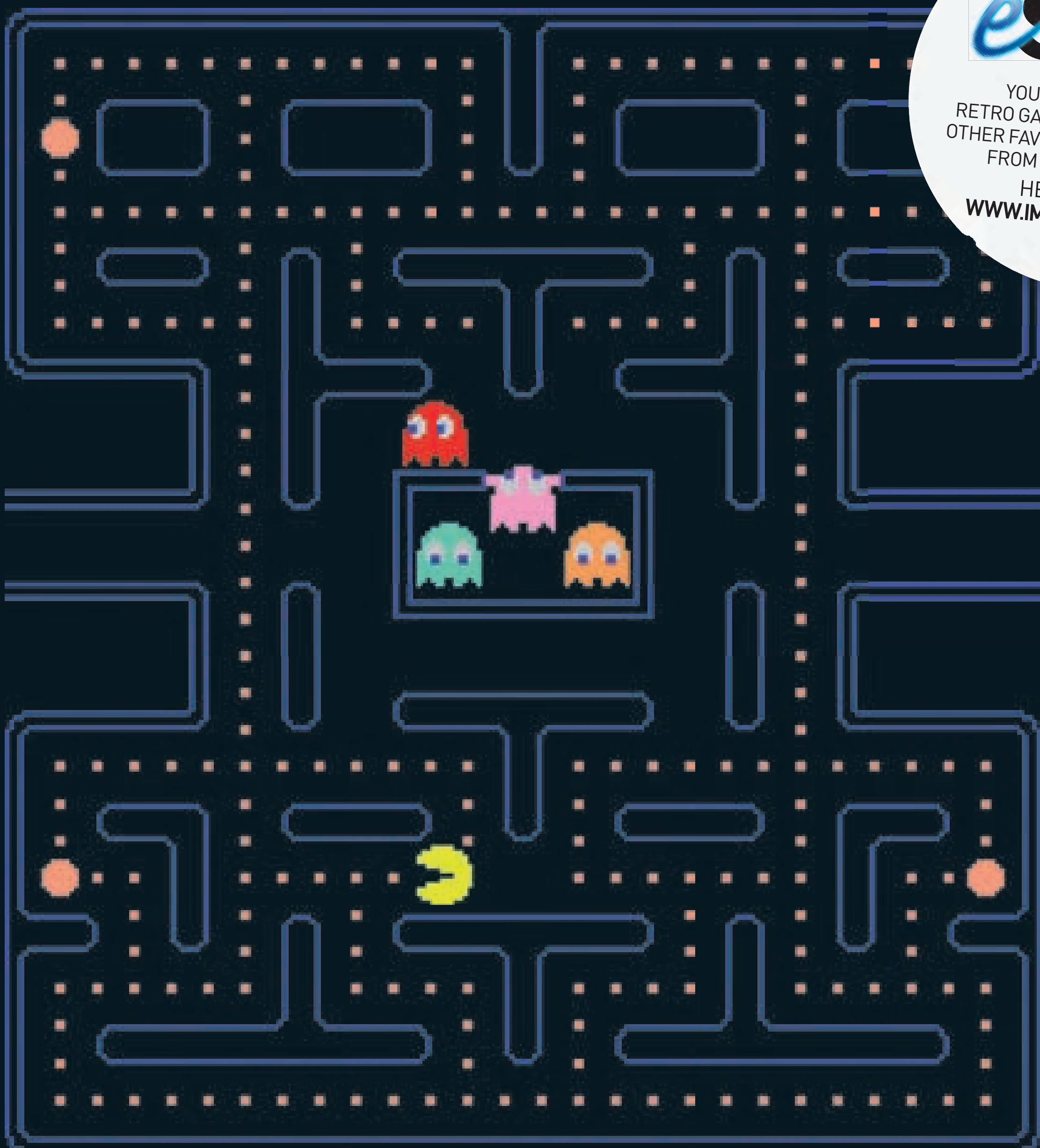
Oh, and the fact that the missus can keep a close eye on what you're up to doesn't hurt either…

HIGH FIVE
The homebrew games Trevor can't live without

1. **School Daze:** A fantastic remake of a fantastic game. Changing the names to your old school mates and teachers must be done.
2. **Wizball:** One of those Marmite games. It's one the most original games of all time and the remake is a must.
3. **Starstrike:** As playable as the original with the bonus of looking beautiful and having online scores.
4. **Thrust Extreme:** Lovely neon graphics/effects and it plays just as great and just as hard as the original.
5. **Driller:** The game plays nice and smoothly and it has lots of hidden extras to find and complete. It also features some wonderful remixes by Infamous.

PAC-ATTACK

He's one of the most iconic videogame characters of all time, but how did the Pac-Man story begin? In an exclusive new interview, Toru Iwatani reveals how the little yellow blob came to be and why he's still entertaining gamers nearly three decades later



MORE EXCITING FEATURES

- Exploding debug units, bitter arguments with Sega of Japan and Michael Jackson. Discover the reasons why Sega's Mega-CD never really stood a chance.
- In a **Retro Gamer** exclusive, *Resident Evil* creator Shinji Mikami reveals the genesis of his PlayStation hit and how it revived survival horror for a new generation of gamers.
- The Electronic Pencil Company may not be as well known as other 8-bit developers, but it still managed to create some cracking games. Find out what they were next issue.

RETRO DIRECTORY

EVERY MONTH, RETRO GAMER WILL BE LISTING ITS FAVOURITE WEBSITES AND INTERVIEWING SOME OF THEIR KEY MEMBERS. THIS MONTH WE SPEAK TO DEAN SWAIN ABOUT GAMESTYLE, A WEBSITE THAT HAS A VERY SPECIAL PLACE IN RETRO GAMER'S HEART, BECAUSE IT'S WHERE DARRAN LANDED HIS VERY FIRST WRITING GIG AND STARTED REVIEWING RETRO GAMES.

THE RETRO GAMER DIRECTORY

ATARI AGE
www.atariage.com
Excellent resource site dedicated to all aspects of Atari gaming.

ATARI ORG
www.atari.org
Another superb Atari site with every machine from the 2600 to arcade classics.

AUSSIE ARCADE
www.aussiearcade.com.au
A fantastic arcade forum catering for an Aussie audience.

CPC ZONE
www.cpczone.net
Excellent site for the Amstrad range of computers with all the latest news and reviews.

C64 GAME ENDINGS
www.c64endings.co.uk/
Over 260 endings for classic and not so classic C64 games.

LEMON64
www.lemon64.com
Superb Commodore 64 site filled with insightful reviews and a friendly forum.

LEMON AMIGA
www.lemonamiga.com
This great Amiga site is run by Kim Lemon, owner of Lemon 64.

MACRETRO
www.macretro.tk
Getting emulators up and running on the Mac, this is a brilliant site.

NEO-GEO.COM
www.neo-geo.com
Dedicated to SNK's systems, but with lots of other stuff to enjoy.

WEEKEND GAMER
www.weekend-gamer.co.uk
Great site that covers a range of topics, from TV to gaming.

SYSTEM16
www.system16.com
Sega focused, but also dedicated to covering as many arcade games as possible.

NTSC-UK
http://ntsc-uk.domino.org/
This site is devoted to imports, but there's a retro section with useful advice on rare imports.

OLD-COMPUTERS.COM
http://old-computers.com
If you think the 2600 is ancient, visit this fascinating site.



Retro Gamer: So when did you set up Gamestyle?

Dean Swain: Gamestyle actually started life focusing only on the Sega Dreamcast back in October 1999 under the guise of Dreamers128, which thankfully only lasted all of a month before I took the decision not only to go multiformat and cover all the consoles that were out at that time, but also to review anything retro.

The shift in coverage required a name change as Dreamers128 obviously referred to Sega's doomed 128-bit wonder. It was around this time that the site was rebranded to Gamestyle and I was lucky enough to enlist the help of Jason Julier, who is not only now a co-owner of the site, but has been the major driving force behind the site over the past nine years.

RG: Why did you decide to base it around everything rather than a specific machine?

DS: Well, as corny as it sounds, I was a games player and not just a Dreamcast owner. Focusing on the one format was very limiting and the PlayStation 2 was what everyone really wanted to know about. As for introducing retro coverage, I remember that at the time the site was launched I was following the progress of Richard Jordan's remake of *Skool Daze (Klass Of 99)* for the PC, which got me on a massive nostalgia trip with the Spectrum. This gave me the urge to remind people of what got us into gaming in the first place plus it was a good excuse to upload some Speccy and Atari 2600 screenshots on the site.

> "FOCUSING ON THE DREAMCAST WAS LIMITING. THE PS2 WAS WHAT PEOPLE WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT"

RG: What would you say gives Gamestyle the edge over similar websites?

DS: First, we are totally independent, so publishers don't get a say on our reviews and scores, which as we all know does sadly still go on. Our articles are not cluttered with intrusive adverts like so many of these other multiformat sites and our writing team past and present is varied in age, which I believe has helped us appeal to a wider audience and not just old gits such as myself. Then there is the amount of content that we have on offer, nearly ten years worth of reviews, features and previews plus our podcasts and downloadable PDF magazines.

RG: What is the most popular part of the Gamestyle site?

DS: As much as I'd love to say our forums, it's probably our reviews and previews as they are what we are best known for. We are very lucky at Gamestyle in that we have a regular bunch of readers who remain very loyal and give us plenty of feedback.

RG: How can our readers contribute?

DS: By simply signing up and posting on our forum and getting themselves involved would be great. We are also currently on the lookout for new writers to help out with our retro reviews. We did have a very good retro editor a few years ago but he left us to edit a certain magazine. I understand that he is doing well!

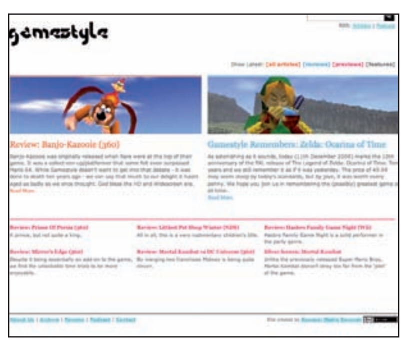
RG: What's your favourite game and why?

DS: The original arcade version of *Double Dragon*. I just clicked with it – so much so that I even designed and drew most of the levels of an unofficial PC remake that still hasn't seen the light of day. As for why I like it so much, it was just a very fun co-op game that I could beat everyone at during my school lunch breaks. In my humble opinion it was the best scrolling brawler ever made. Just a shame about the sequels and home conversions that everyone seems to remember above the arcade version.

DEEPER LOOK – WEBSITE OF THE MONTH

Gamestyle
www.gamestyle.net

Gamestyle has been around now for a staggering nine years and remains one of the most entertaining non-corporate gaming websites around. Featuring a thriving community, Gamestyle prides itself on its well-written and non-biased reviews and covers everything from the latest 360 and PS3 releases to classics like *Metroid* and *Football Manager*. Indeed, one of Gamestyle's greatest strengths is that it's able to offer something for everyone and as a result is a true gamer's website, with polite and enthusiastic forum members and a small core team of talented writers. Oh, and if you fancy a giggle then look for the *Project Zero/Fatal Frame* review in their massive archive.



RETRO MUSEUM
www.retrocomputermuseum.co.uk
What's interesting about this is that very soon it will be a physical place you can visit.

RACKET BOY
http://racketboy.com/
There's a definite Sega slant to Racket Boy, but it's a lot of fun.

RADIO SEGA
www.radiosega.net
If you're a fan of Sega music you'll love Radio Sega.

SEGA-16.COM
www.sega-16.com
Mega Drive site with some incredibly in-depth interviews.

RETRO 101
www.retro101.co.uk
It's fairly new, but Retro 101 has some informative articles.

RETRO GAMING RADIO
www.monroeworld.com
Superb monthly podcast that looks at the US game market.

RLLMUK FORUM
www.rllmukforum.com/index.php
All the latest games and a retro section with helpful members.

THE RUBBER BEERMAT
http://myweb.tiscali.co.uk/themanor33/TRBv2/
Excellent Spectrum site that champions a lot of rare games.

SHOOT THE CORE
www.shootthecore.moonpod.com
This brilliant site loves shmups of all descriptions.

SHMUPS
www.shmups.com
Absolutely amazing website dedicated to the best gaming genre of all time.

VIDEOGAME MUSEUM
www.vgmuseum.com
Screenshots, game endings, cover scans, and reviews.

THE VIRTUAL CONSOLE ARCHIVE
www.vc-reviews.com
Your one-stop shop for everything VC-related.

WORLD OF SPECTRUM
www.worldofspectrum.org
Superb Spectrum site that offers a friendly forum.

GAMESTYLE
www.gamestyle.net
Long-standing website that now includes retro articles.

If you want to add your website to our expanding directory, please contact Darran at **darran.jones@imagine-publishing.co.uk**

END/GAME



KUNG-FU MASTER

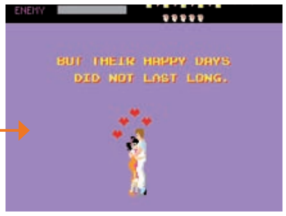
After receiving a taunting kidnap note, our hero goes off in search of his beloved Sylvia. This is one scrolling fighter that isn't going to have a happy ending…











SCREEN 1

Kung-Fu Master isn't an easy game by any standards, but the fifth floor is a nightmare. Luckily Thomas is up to the task, and with Sylvia tantalisingly close by, our plucky hero gives his adversary a few swift kicks to the head.

SCREEN 2

The kidnappers vanquished, Sylvia shrugs off her binds as if they were made of cotton – why she couldn't do that in the first place is anyone's guess. Gingerly walking towards her man, Thomas gets ready for his just rewards.

SCREEN 3

Reunited at last, the lovers share a tender moment – although it's not a patch on the smacker Billy Lee gets in *Double Dragon* – and Thomas wonders why he couldn't have a more befitting name for a master of kung-fu.

SCREEN 4

Get a room, guys. While they continue their embrace, Thomas is wondering if all that work was worth it. He's fought through five floors, defeated numerous foes, dealt with fire-breathing dragons, and he just gets a cuddle for his efforts.

SCREEN 5

The final screen suggests that their happiness is shattered due to Sylvia getting kidnapped again. The reality is far sadder. Fed up with constantly rescuing his girl, Thomas kills her and pursues a career in action movies.